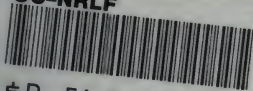


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ENGLISH MISSION TO ABYSSINIA

1867

GERALD H. PORTAL



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ENGLISH MISSION TO ABYSSINIA.

AN ACCOUNT OF

THE ENGLISH MISSION

TO

KING JOHANNIS OF ABYSSINIA

IN 1887.

BY

GERALD H. PORTAL.

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ENGLISH MISSION TO ABYSSINIA.

INTRODUCTORY.

MY friends have asked me to give some account of the adventures of the recent English Mission to the King of Abyssinia, with which I had the honour to be entrusted. As I only propose to write a personal narrative, and not a political treatise, I must be content with the bare story of our journey to and from the camp of the King, with a very brief description of the country through which we passed and of the people with whom we came into contact.

It will be remembered that in 1883, after the receipt of the news of the annihilation at Melbeis in Kordofan of the Egyptian army under General Hicks Pacha, the Egyptian Government, at the instance of England, came to the determination to abandon the Soudan Provinces, and to direct all its energies to the withdrawal of the garrisons scattered throughout those vast districts. The position of these garrisons was evidently most precarious, but none were in more imminent danger than the unfortunate soldiers quartered at Sanhit, Keren, Galabat, and other fortresses along the Abyssinian frontier, who now found themselves between the triumphant hordes of the Mahdi on the one side and the almost equally savage armies of the Negroos* on the other, despised by both,

* I should here explain that "Negoo" is the title usually given to King Johannis. The word "Negoo" is simply the Abyssian equivalent for the English word "King."

and without the smallest hope of obtaining quarter from either. To remain at their posts would be to render their reduction by siege, famine, or treachery, merely a question of time, while to sally forth and to endeavour to reach the coast at Massowah would be a confession of weakness which would infallibly cause the whole of the surrounding country to declare for the Mahdi, and would render their escape impossible. There was but one chance of successfully carrying out the evacuation of this part of the Soudan; if the King of Abyssinia, by English influence or by the offer of a suitable reward, could be induced not only to abstain from attacking these Egyptian garrisons, but even to grant them a safe passage through his country, their eventual arrival at Massowah would be not only possible but very probable. It was therefore with this object that Admiral Sir William Hewitt, with a large staff of English officers, and accompanied by an Egyptian plenipotentiary, proceeded to meet King Johannis at Adwa, now the chief town of Abyssinia, situated about 120 miles to the south-west of Massowah. Without much difficulty the Negoos was induced to sign a treaty, by virtue of which he promised to allow the Egyptian garrisons on his frontier to retreat peacefully through his dominions, and to give them a safe-conduct as far as the neighbourhood of Massowah. On the other hand, the places evacuated by Egypt on the Abyssinian frontier, the fortresses of Galabat, Amadib, Sanhit, and all the Bogos country were ceded to Abyssinia, together with all the stores, arms, and munitions of war at that time collected in the different arsenals. No mention is made in this treaty of Ailet,

Sahati, Wia, or Monkullu, the occupation of which by the Italian troops became subsequently the cause of so much bloodshed and expenditure both of money and life.

The treaty was, in the first instance, loyally carried out on both sides. The Egyptian garrisons arrived in safety at Massowah, and some hundreds of thousands of Remington rifles, and millions of rounds of ammunition were handed over to King Johannis together with the evacuated positions.

It is unnecessary to recall all the circumstances which led to the occupation of Massowah by Italian troops, which took place shortly after the signature of this treaty. It is enough to say that the Egyptians wished to evacuate the place, the Sultan, to whom it would naturally revert, was not prepared to take over the charge of it, the English did not want it, and the Italians stepped in. Disputes soon arose between the Italian Governor and the Negroes respecting the taxes levied at Massowah on goods coming from, or imported into, Abyssinia, in the course of which King Johannis complained that the Italians failed in carrying out the provisions of the treaty, in virtue of which he claimed that no taxes whatever could be levied on such merchandise. The irritation created by these and similar disputes rapidly increased, and reached a dangerous point when the Italians, in order to protect the caravan road between Massowah and the interior, on which murder and brigandage had become so common as almost to put a stop to all trade, sent a couple of battalions to take possession of the position of Sahati, a desolate, barren place, but valuable on account of its

commanding the only water to be found for nearly a whole day's journey along the road. At this moment Ras Alula, the Abyssinian Chief governing the frontier Province of Hamazen and commanding a large army recruited in that Province and in Tigré, happened to be engaged in an expedition directed against the dervishes concentrated near Kassala. This campaign soon ended in the battle of Kofit, at which the overwhelming numbers of the Abyssinians gained a hardly-won victory, but at the price of an immense loss of life; nor was Ras Alula able completely to accomplish the object of the expedition, *i.e.*, the subjection and occupation of Kassala; the Abyssinian troops did indeed enter triumphantly into the town, but it was not considered prudent to remain there, and they were forced to be satisfied with their empty, and perhaps doubtful victory, and to return again to the protection of their native mountains.

Smarting from his great loss of men, and from his failure to accomplish the complete destruction of the dervishes of Kassala, Ras Alula returned to find the Italians in possession of Sahati. He determined to assume the offensive, and in January, 1887, directed an attack against the Italian works. This assault was unsuccessful, but on the following day a small reinforcement of 450 men, which was being sent from Massowah to relieve the garrison of Sahati, was attacked by 10,000 Abyssinians under the command of Ras Alula himself, and, after a gallant and desperate resistance, was massacred almost to a man. The attack was made at a place called Dogali, where the road to Sahati runs

through a barren plain about three quarters of a mile wide, commanded on every side by rocky hills, from which an incessant and well directed fire was poured in upon the little band of Italians. The favourite Abyssinian mode of warfare was well exemplified on that day, for, despite their great superiority in numbers, the Abyssinians never left their cover till hardly an Italian soldier was left alive. One of the very few survivors, an Italian officer, said that until there were scarcely thirty Italians still capable of holding a rifle he never saw even a single Abyssinian, but that an incessant hail of bullets was poured down from behind every rock and every tree on the neighbouring hills all around them. At last came the final rush, with its invariable Abyssinian accompaniments of plunder, slaughter of the wounded, and mutilation of the bodies. Two days later the little garrison of Sahati was withdrawn to Massowah without meeting with opposition.

The universal cry for vengeance which arose on the news of this massacre reaching Italy, will be remembered by everybody. Preparations were at once made for an expedition on a large scale, which should inflict signal punishment on the Abyssinians; the work of fortifying Massowah and its suburb Monkullu was pushed on, with a view to making these places impregnable to attack by any force without artillery; and measures were taken for the despatch to the Red Sea of some twenty thousand or thirty thousand men. The favorable season was, however, passing, the tropical rains and heat were beginning, and it was decided to take no aggressive action till the following winter. As the summer months went on, the

serious nature of the undertaking which lay before Italy became more and more apparent ; a war of revenge could bring but little practical benefit, and would cost many millions of pounds and probably many hundreds of valuable lives ; in the meantime Italy's action in Europe would be cramped proportionately to the magnitude of her task in Africa, and in the actual state of European politics it was most desirable, and might at any moment become imperatively necessary, that the hands of Italy should be free. English influence was supposed, and rightly supposed, to have greater weight with the Nagoos than that of any other Power. Her Majesty's Government were willing to help their friends the Italians, and it was eventually decided that an English Mission should be sent to submit to King Johannis certain terms on which Italy would consent to refrain from any act of war.

CAIRO TO MASSOWAH.

ON the 17th of October, 1887, Her Majesty's Government decided to entrust to me the honour of taking a Mission into Abyssinia, to attempt to bring about a pacification between King John and the Italians, it being impressed upon me at the same time that there was not a moment to be lost, as the favourable season for warlike operations was already commencing, and the Italian Government could not undertake to refrain from acts of overt hostility for more than five weeks, *i.e.*, till

the end of November, even though I should not have returned by that time.

My first step was to ask permission to take with me Mr. Beech, A.V.S., then serving in the Egyptian Army, whom, of all my acquaintances in Egypt, I considered to be the best adapted for the sort of work which lay before us. Throughout our expedition I never ceased to congratulate myself on my good fortune in having secured his invaluable assistance and companionship. I then engaged the services of an interpreter, named Ahmed Fehmy, a most respectable Egyptian of some education, who had lived for two years on the borders of Abyssinia, and said he could both write and speak Amharic fluently. He had accompanied Prince Hassan as interpreter in the ill-fated Egyptian Expedition against Abyssinia in 1876. I also took with me my English servant, named Hutchisson, who volunteered to accompany me in spite of the gloomy picture of the dangers and troubles before us which I drew for his edification, and who, I may at at once add, behaved throughout with the greatest pluck, self-possession, and cheerfulness under difficulties.

It had been impressed upon me that the greatest secrecy was to be observed about my Mission; except the members of H. M.'s Agency not a soul was to know anything about it. Our preparations were therefore made with much mystery and many precautions: candles, tea, and other stores were purchased in small instalments, and at different shops; the ammunition and tent were supposed to be wanted for a shooting expedition; and our passages on the steamer from Suez to Massowah were booked in the name of my servant Hutchisson "and three friends."

In three days everything was ready, and I left Cairo at 6 p.m. on the 19th October for Alexandria, to meet the English steamer from Brindisi, which was bringing letters from the Queen and Lord Salisbury, accrediting me to King John, and certain presents for the King and Ras Alula, for which I had telegraphed to England a week before.

The presents for the Negoos consisted of a sword of honour, a Winchester repeating rifle and 500 rounds of ammunition, and a very large and excellent telescope, with its stand, suitable equally for astronomical and terrestrial purposes. For Ras Alula there was another Winchester repeating rifle with ammunition in a handsome case, and for Ras Aria Selassie, the King's son, another sword of honour. In taking over the long wooden tin-lined cases containing these presents from the Captain of the P. and O. steamer, the thought struck me that these would indeed be awkward loads for a mule to carry in a mountainous country, but I little foresaw the amount of anxiety, trouble, and imprecations both loud and deep, of which they, especially the telescope, were destined later to be the cause.

Leaving Alexandria by the Indian mail train, I arrived at Suez on the evening of the 20th, where I found Beech, Hutchisson, and Ahmed Fehmy, who had just arrived from Cairo with all the stores and baggage of the Expedition. The next day we embarked on board the Egyptian S.S. "Narghileh," a small, dirty, greasy-looking steamer, bound for Jeddah, Suakin, and Massowah, in which we very soon discovered that our travelling companions consisted of cockroaches and other smaller

animals innumerable, a flock of sheep, a few cows, many cocks, hens, turkeys, and geese, a dozen of the evil-looking Greek adventurers who always appear like vultures round a dead carcase whenever there is a possibility of a campaign in North Africa, a discharged convict, and, to crown all, about a hundred Arab pilgrims bound for Mecca, picturesque perhaps at a considerable distance, but on closer inspection decidedly offensive both to the eye and nose; full of fanaticism and vermin.

It was not to be expected that I would be able to embark at Suez without being recognized, and many were the indiscreet questions which I had to parry as best I could as to my destination and the object of my journey; it is to be feared that both Beech and I came well under the definition of diplomatists as "men who were sent to lie abroad for the good of their country."

The "Narghileh" would not have been worthy of Egypt if she had started at the advertised time, so we were not surprised to find ourselves still at Suez at sunset instead of having got under weigh at mid-day. At last, however, with much creaking and splashing, swearing and shouting, we got clear of the jetty, and the crazy old tub rolled solemnly down the Gulf of Suez at her extreme speed of five knots an hour.

Next day we touched at the quarantine station of Tor, where it appeared that there was nothing to disembark nor to take on board, but two or three hours were wasted, apparently because the Captain wished to have a chat and a friendly cigarette with a friend. From Tor we proceeded in the same stately fashion to Yembo, a small village on the Arabian coast, where one passenger

was to be embarked. But here a difficulty arose—Yembo could not be found! The crew of the “Narghileh” consisted apparently of three individuals, who all called themselves captain, a Reis, or sort of boatswain, and two or three decrepit old men. Unfortunately none of these appeared to know the way to Yembo. The use of maps or charts was apparently either despised or unknown; such a new-fangled proceeding as taking an observation had probably never been heard of by these worthies; we therefore spent the greater part of the morning of the 24th of October in wandering vaguely up and down looking for a certain opening in the line of coral reefs, which was supposed to be the way in to Yembo. At last however we arrive, the solitary passenger is embarked, three or four hours more are wasted in cigarettes or in thinking of making another start, and we get under weigh again, this time for Jeddah.

Off Jeddah the following morning the same process of wandering backwards and forwards looking for the way in is repeated, but eventually we drop anchor in the picturesque harbour, close to a crowd of quaint-looking pearl fishing boats. On enquiry we were told that the ship could not sail till the next morning at the earliest, and although the delay was annoying, I was not sorry to have an opportunity of seeing such a truly Mohammedan town, as yet comparatively unspoilt by the usual influx of Greeks, Maltese, and half-bred Europeans, boasting indeed of little beauty of architecture, but containing many picturesque gables and projecting windows of carved woodwork. By far the most interesting study however was the miscellaneous collection of Mussulman

humanity which surged through the narrow streets : swaggering Turks from Stamboul rubbed shoulders against yellow-coloured pilgrims from Singapore, dignified and large-turbaned Indians from the Punjab, and truculent well-armed Afghans ; while black fanatics from Darfur and Kordofan scowled upon fat, sleek Ulemas from Morocco. Although almost every second man we met was armed to the teeth with murderous or quaint-looking weapons, I saw but little signs of disorder or violence ; there was indeed plenty of noise and shouting, but the crowd was, on the whole, remarkably quiet and well-behaved. I could not help contrasting in my own mind this admixture of Mussulmans from all parts of the world, brought together by religious enthusiasm, with the vast crowds of Christian pilgrims, equally from all parts of the world, which I had seen collected together, some years ago, at Easter-time in Jerusalem. So far as concerned dignity, singleness of purpose, and orderly behaviour, the result of the comparison was not altogether in favour of the Christians.

Soon after our return on board in the evening Beech complained of feeling unwell, and I was made rather uneasy at finding he had a sharp touch of fever ; promptly I administered to him a few of the productions of Mr. Cockle, followed, a couple of hours later, by a strong dose of quinine ; he also consented to sleep this night in the cabin instead of on deck. Next day the fever was still present, so I continued to ply him with quinine, but in spite of, or perhaps in consequence of my medical treatment he never shook himself clear of fever till we landed at Massowah.

We arrived without incident at Suakim at 3 p.m. on the 27th October, where, by the kindness of the senior naval officer, it was arranged that we should leave the old "Narghileh" and continue our journey to Massowah next morning in H.M.S. "Starling." Both Beech and I felt that our dinner that night with Colonel Kitchener, and our comfortable night's rest on the veranda of Government House, fully compensated us for all the discomforts of the journey from Suez. Before saying good-bye I got Kitchener to give me a letter of introduction and recommendation to Ras Alula, with whom he is in occasional correspondence. I did not expect to have to make any use of such a letter, nor did I imagine that it would be of much effect, but I was glad to have some document addressed to the Ras which I should be able to show to any of his lieutenants who might arrest me soon after crossing the frontier.

At seven o'clock next morning we went on board the "Starling," and arrived at Massowah, after a delightful passage, at 9.30 the following night (the 29th).

Early on the morning of the 30th, I went to see General Saletta, commanding the Italian Garrison; he at once told me he had received instructions to do everything in his power to facilitate my preparations, that although he had not been told the precise object of my journey, yet it was an open secret I was going to make an attempt to bring about some arrangement which would satisfy the honour of Italy, and perhaps save her from an arduous campaign, involving the expenditure of many millions of "lire" and the loss of hundreds of lives. We then had a long conversation

on the whole situation, which led me to hope that the Italian Government would, in dictating their terms, show the same foresight and moderation, and take the same wide views of the whole question, as those expressed by this most charming, courteous, and talented of generals.

I then went to see Colonel Vigano, the chief of the staff, and arranged that next morning I should receive twelve good mules, four horses, and six trustworthy native mule drivers, two of whom would be capable of guiding us to Ras Alula's head quarters. I learnt at the same time that King Johannis was still at Dobra Tabor, near Lake Tsana, and that Ras Alula was expected in a day or two to arrive at Gura. I was advised therefore that my best way of travelling would be to go straight to Gura, *viâ* the Yangus and Baresa, that road being, I was told, well known and less arduous than the path to Asmara.

All this time I was becoming more and more uneasy at not receiving my final instructions with definite permission to start, telegrams were constantly being exchanged between Her Majesty's Government, Sir E. Baring, and myself, but it was not till late in the afternoon of the 1st of November that the final terms which constituted the Italian "ultimatum" were telegraphed to me, and that I was instructed that I might now start to submit them to King Johannis "if I thought I could do so with safety." I at once replied that I would start at daybreak next morning. The terms on which the Italian Government would be willing to come to an amicable arrangement with King John, have recently been

published at Rome in a "Green Book," and were to the following effect:—

- "1. The King of Abyssinia will express his great regret for the unjust attack suffered by the Italians last January.
- "2. Sahati and Wia will remain definitively Italian territory, with a zone beyond of at least one day's march. Ghinda will become a frontier town of Abyssinia. The valley of Ailet will pass into the possession, or at least under the protection, of Italy. The frontier to be marked by common agreement, and in concert with England, by pillars on the spot.
- "3. The King of Abyssinia will recognize the Protectorate of Italy over the Assaorta and the Habab Arabs.
- "4. Italy, in accord with England, will occupy the region of Sanhit.
- "5. A Treaty of Peace, Amity, and Commerce will be signed between Italy and Abyssinia."

The Italian Government at the same time undertook not to commence any active hostilities before the beginning of December, but as the favorable season was so short they could not undertake to postpone them beyond that date. I was thus given four weeks to make the journey to the King and back, his Majesty being then at Dobra Tabor, a journey which, under the most favorable circumstances, could not possibly be accomplished in less than from seven weeks to two months without allowing for any delay, or for the slow rate of travelling necessary for the baggage mules. However, it was not for us to make any remonstrance, and our final preparations were hurried on with all possible speed.

The promised mules and horses arrived at the appointed time, and I was pleased and satisfied with their sturdy and healthy appearance. The case was different

with the six guides and mule drivers, who were marched up to me under the guard of two Italian soldiers. Two of these worthies were Abyssinian prisoners of war, two were from the Shoho district—a country notorious for its breed of robbers and professional brigands, and the remaining two were evil-looking Arabs belonging to one of the smaller tribes near Massowah. Neither Beech nor I at all liked the looks of these men, but as we were informed that no others were obtainable we had to be satisfied with what we could get, and hope for the best. Till late that evening we worked at getting all our stores and the baggage of the caravan on shore from the "Starling." We then divided it into the requisite number of loads, distributing the weight as equally as was possible under the circumstances. Saddles, bridles, head-stalls, and ropes were inspected and found to be complete, and in short every preparation was made for an early start.

THE JOURNEY TO THE KING.

At daybreak on the 2nd November we began to saddle and load the mules, and after half an hour's work we had made three discoveries; first, that Beech, Hutchisson, and I, would have to do the whole of the work ourselves; secondly, that our native guides and muleteers were worse than useless; and thirdly, that Ahmed Fehmy was both sulky and helpless. Seeing that matters were progressing but slowly, I engaged the services of a sturdy black Somali boy from Aden, who

offered to accompany me on the expedition, but it was not until 8.45 a.m. that the mules were all loaded, our horses saddled, and everything ready for a start. General Saletta and his staff came to see us off, and after cordial expressions of mutual good wishes, Beech and I mounted our horses, the word was given, and in five minutes the English Mission had left Massowah, and was slowly winding along the path to Monkullu. It was only to be expected that all sorts of defects in the distribution, adjustment, and balance of the loads, would make themselves apparent as soon as we were actually on the march, and sure enough, during the first hour we were forced to halt nearly a dozen times in consequence of some load slipping, or of some saddle showing signs of galling a mule's back. By degrees things settled themselves into their places, and the stoppages became less frequent; but the utter incapacity and helplessness, whether real or assumed, of the men, and the sulky stupidity of Ahmed Fehmy, gave me some grounds for anxiety, when I contrasted in my mind the level sandy road along which we were now travelling with the black and forbidding mountain ranges which lay before us.

However, every allowance had to be made for the difficulties always attendant on a first start, and in little more than an hour and a half we marched into the Fort of Monkullu, at that time the most advanced point held by the Italian troops. Here I found a telegram for me from General Saletta saying, that Bruru Worke, a young Abyssinian, who had been educated for three years in England, had arrived at Massowah, and wished to accompany me to the King. I had already been in

correspondence with the Foreign Office about this young man, but had scarcely hoped that he would arrive in time to be able to come with me ; I was therefore most agreeably surprised to hear of his arrival, and telegraphed back to General Saletta, begging that Bruru Worke might be sent out to Monkullu without a moment's delay.

After being most hospitably entertained for a couple of hours by Col. Avvogadro and the officers of the garrison, I started the caravan again on their march to a torrent called the Yangus, where our guides said there was a very good camping ground for the first night, with plenty of water and firewood. I myself remained at Monkullu to wait for Bruru Worke. At about three o'clock he arrived, dressed up in varnished shoes, white shirt, and smart clothes, looking very far from prepared to continue his journey at once. However, I soon gave him to understand that unless he came with me he would not have another chance, probably for months, of getting into his own country, and that in order to do so he must get ready to start without a moment's delay, and must join me at the Yangus before midnight. I arranged that two mules should be supplied at once for himself and his baggage, and having convinced him that if he lost no time he would easily be able to rejoin me by nine or ten o'clock that night, I sent him off again to Massowah to collect his effects and to change his clothes.

I should here explain that I was anxious not to remain beyond midnight at the Yangus as the district was a turbulent one, and formed part of the disputed territory between the Italian lines and Ras Alula's country, which was said to be infested by wandering bands of brigands and evil-

disposed Arab tribes. At 3.30 I parted with my kind Italian hosts, and amid a shower of good wishes cantered off to overtake the caravan.

After a very hot and dusty march under a blazing sun and without a breath of air, we arrived without further event at the Yangus just before sunset. As soon as the animals were unsaddled and picketed, I sent the guides to bring water. After some search and a little delay they hesitatingly confessed that they had been mistaken, that there was no water anywhere near, none in fact nearer than Baresa, at a distance of about five or six hours march in the direction of Gura. Though not as yet very serious, this was extremely annoying as both the animals and ourselves were a good deal distressed by this first day's march through the hot and shadeless desert; to make matters worse it then appeared that all the water we carried had been drunk or spilled on the road by the men, while to crown all, Ahmed Fehmy was at this moment discovered in the act of draining the last drop from a private store of nearly a quart of water which I was keeping in view of eventualities, and which he knew he was not allowed to touch.

I had previously thought it advisable to march again about midnight so as to get clear of this somewhat dangerous district, but this now became an imperative necessity in order that we might reach water before the heat of the sun should complete the exhaustion of our thirsty mules. I therefore told everyone to lie down and have five hours sleep, while I intended to sit up and keep a look out for uninvited visitors on the one hand, and for the arrival of Bruru Worke on the other.

Hungry and thirsty as they were, Beech and Hutchisson stretched themselves on the sand and were sound asleep in five minutes; Ahmed Fehmy, who had had a good drink, and was therefore able to lay in a liberal supply of solid food as well, soon followed their example, and finally the men, after eating and chattering for nearly a couple of hours, also dropped off one by one, leaving me undisturbed to enjoy the wild beauty of the scene by the light of the full moon.

In spite of fatigue, hunger, and thirst, I felt no temptation whatever to sleep; for though glad to be at last actually on the march, an uncomfortable suspicion had for some hours been growing in my mind, and was rapidly becoming stronger, as to whether the mule drivers and guides were really so ignorant and helpless as they appeared to be, or whether *mauvaise volonté*, not to say treachery, had not a good deal to do with the matter. I had not liked their sulky demeanour when remonstrated with occasionally on the road, and still less did I like the way in which they had sat apart conversing earnestly in low tones when the rest of the party had fallen asleep. However, I soon came to the conclusion that there was nothing to be done but to watch them closely, and to act promptly and unsparingly on the slightest overt sign of treachery or hostility.

Slowly the hours passed but brought no sign of of Bruru; midnight came, and I would wait no longer. I accordingly roused the sleepers, and in another minute we were all hard at work saddling the mules and horses and tying on the loads. That is to say, Beech and

Hutchisson did nearly all the work, while the men feebly loafed about and got in the way. At 1 a.m. all was ready, not a sign could be seen of Bruru or of any one coming from the direction of Monkullu, although by the bright moonlight the night was almost as clear as the day, and silently the caravan began to scramble up the rocky torrent bed, along which, according to the guides, lay the road to Baresa. Although the path had seemed difficult, and the halts frequent in the daytime, matters were a hundred times worse now. All through the night our unfortunate mules were clambering over impossible rocks, slipping and sliding down precipitous ravines, forcing their way through dense masses of unyielding mimosa thorns, and climbing range after range of black rocky mountains, on which no beast of burden but an Abyssinian mule could even obtain a foothold. During all this time, of course, the loads were continually slipping, and had to be tied on again by Beech, Hutchisson, and myself, for the natives either could not or would not give any help, while the mountains seemed to grow steeper, and the country more parched at every moment.

The night was exceptionally hot, the thermometer standing at nearly 100° Fahrenheit the whole time, and as in order to spare our willing horses, we three Englishmen did nearly all the climbing on foot, we were becoming a good deal exhausted and thoroughly parched by the time when the sun rose and found us still climbing over hot marble and granite rocks. Six o'clock, the hour by which, at the latest, we should have been at Baresa, passed, and we were apparently further than ever from water, but the guides swore by all they held sacred that

they knew the way well, and that we were on the right path. Seven, and then eight o'clock; the guides now confessed that at one part of the night they had made a mistake in the road, but that now we were quite close to water, which should be in a plain, visible at a short distance in front of us. At nine we reached this plain, and most unpromising and dry it looked; for another hour we travelled across it, and then the guides began to lead us up the side of another mountain range. By this time the sun was very powerful, and both our animals and ourselves were much distressed. Though I had not said a word to the others on the subject, I had now but little doubt in my own mind as to the treachery of our guides; I therefore halted the caravan and again severely cross-examined the natives. As the chief guide still swore positively that water was just in front, I decided to try one last chance, and rode on with him alone for about four miles, to a spot which he had pointed out as containing the hoped-for water. Here all doubt as to the man's treachery was set at rest by his sudden desertion, at a moment when I was actually debating in my own mind whether to tie him to my saddle and to take him back to the others, or whether to shoot him on the spot.

The first thing for me to do now was to find my way back to Beech and the caravan, which I succeeded in doing with some difficulty. There appeared but one course open to us, namely, to cut off all the loads from the mules, to leave everything on the spot, and then to turn back and try to make our way to Monkullu; for it was evident that although we might be within ten

or fifteen miles of the pools at Baresa, yet we had no notion whether they lay to the North, South, East, or West of us, and it would be madness to wander vaguely about looking for them. While we were hastily discussing the situation a shout from Hutchisson attracted our attention, and we turned round just in time to see all our men desert at once and disappear in every direction among the bushes. Luckily for these wretches our carbines were attached to our saddles at some yards distance, otherwise most surely would Beech and I have made some of them repent their treachery. The black Somali boy was the only one who now remained with us.

There was not a moment to be lost; I feared that in any case, even with the best of luck, the chances would be very great indeed against our ever finding the way back to the Italian lines before sunset, and I did not think that any of the party could last through another night without water. We therefore hastily cut off all the loads and set the mules free, knowing that they would follow us; we then roused Ahmed Fehmy, who was making himself useful by sitting on a stone and moaning to himself. Having told my little party that there was not the slightest doubt as to our getting back with the greatest ease, but that above all they must keep together, I gave the word to mount our thirsty but plucky horses, and silently we began to follow our tracks back towards Monkullu—and water!

For two or three hours we jogged along silently, each man feeling that he must spare his strength to the utmost; the heat and pitiless glare of the sun were

intense, and many an anxious glance did I throw back to see if we were all keeping together. Nothing was said, but we all knew that, in reality, the chances were many against our being able to trace our road back again over the mountains which we had climbed during the night, even assuming that our strength and that of our horses held out.

At about one o'clock Ahmed Fehmy began to lag behind; we again warned him that the safety of the whole party depended on our keeping together: our adjurations, requests, or commands had only a temporary effect; again and again he allowed himself to fall half-a-mile behind, and sometimes more; again and again Beech and I rode back to bring him on; three times I solemnly warned him that I would not wait again, that by halting the others while we brought him forward I was imperilling the lives of the whole party. He was, in reality, much the freshest of us all, he had had food and water long after any of us, and he had done none of the severe manual labour with the mule loads which had so exhausted the rest of us. At last I swore to him that I would neither come back again, nor wait, that he must keep up with us, or else follow our tracks; but I assured him that in the latter case I would have help sent to him at once from Monkullu, if we ever reached it. He promised to keep up with us, and certainly his horse was the freshest of all, but five minutes later he dropped behind again, got off, and lay down to sleep on the sand,—such at least was the report made to me later on by Mahomed, the Aden boy, for neither Beech nor I noticed his disappearance till long after, and Hutchisson was long past noticing anything.

Poor Ahmed Fehmy was never again seen alive. His body was found next day and brought in for burial at Monkullu. His death I attribute entirely to want of pluck on his part; he was, or at least appeared to be, much the freshest of the party, he had drunk water long since we had, but he gave way, almost without an effort, to the intense longing, against which we were all struggling, to lie down and give up the battle. I may here mention that Her Majesty's Government some months later most liberally authorised a sum of £450 to be paid to the family, in consideration of Ahmed having met his death while in the English Service.

Hour after hour we rode silently on under the burning sun, our eyes fixed on the ground, looking for every sign which should tell us that we were still on the path we had followed on our outward march. At times, where the ground was covered with loose rocks and boulders, our direction was almost guesswork, as a whole regiment of cavalry might march over it and leave no tracks. Once or twice we found that we had gone astray, but we always managed to get on to our old path again before much time had been lost. At about 2.30 p.m. the heat was intense, the black rocks over and between which we were riding reflected the heat of the sun to a painful degree; a small pocket thermometer showed me that the temperature was 102° in the shade, what it was in the sun I did not enquire. Hutchisson was now so exhausted and in such pain that he could scarcely sit on his horse, I therefore called a halt for six minutes to see if a little rest would do any good. The experiment was a doubtful

one, as the difficulty of rousing ourselves at the end of the allotted time was perhaps worse than if we had not dismounted, but the rest was probably good for the horses. Poor Hutchisson was suffering dreadful pain, but he overcame his intense longing to lie down and quietly subside into oblivion, and struggled on with a pluck that is beyond all praise. Beech had a bottle of whisky in his wallet, and we each took one mouthful, spitting most of it out again as it burnt our swollen mouths and tongues.

About this time much of our anxiety about following the right track was relieved by the intelligence of one of the loose mules, which placidly jogged along in front of us all, with his nose near the ground and his ears cocked, following our old tracks like a dog on a scent. Without the slightest hesitation we all acknowledged afterwards that to this mule we owed our lives. About four o'clock we reached our old camping ground at the Yangus, but shortly afterwards we again had to halt for eight minutes to allow Hutchisson to rest. Both Beech and I began to despair of ever getting him into Monkullu, his pain as he lay upon the ground was evidently very great, and we had the greatest difficulty in getting him on to his horse again. Not only were his lips and tongue absolutely black and stiffened, as indeed were those of Beech and myself, but he was suffering most violent internal pains, which at times quite doubled him up, but from which we were as yet free. We were both, however, too feeble ourselves to be able to give him much assistance, and he owes his present existence entirely to his determination and indomitable pluck in struggling on. Mahomed, the Aden boy, had now fallen a little way behind, but I

had but little anxiety about him, as he was comparatively fresh, and because we had now reached the sandy plains over which the tracks of our horses were clearly marked. Meanwhile the sun was rapidly approaching the horizon, but such was our confidence in our "pioneer" mule, that we felt no anxiety about finding the road if only our strength and that of our horses held out. Just at sunset I calculated that we were not more than four or five miles from the Italian forts, and the road being now clear, I squeezed my unfortunate horse into a canter, and went on ahead to get help sent out at once for the Aden boy and Ahmed Fehmy.

On reaching the Italian pickets I was stopped by a sentry, who soon grasped the condition of affairs, although I could not explain much as my stiff, swollen, and blackened tongue had rather "struck work." He rushed off to get water for Beech and Hutchisson, who, I explained, were not far behind me. Five minutes later I reached a well, from which some kindly soldiers at once produced a bucketful of water for my gallant old horse, and a large mugful for myself. It is absolutely impossible to try to explain the joy of that drink. I was at once surrounded by the officers of the garrison, and in less than a quarter of an hour two trustworthy Arab scouts had started on swift camels with water and provisions for the Aden boy and for Ahmed Fehmy, the former of whom arrived at Monkullu within an hour, but the body of the latter was not found till the next day. Half an hour later Beech, Hutchisson, and I were all in bed, being cared for and looked after by the Italian commanding officer and the

doctor of the garrison, with a kindness which no words can express.

The night, almost sleepless and feverish as it was, gave us some rest and refreshment, but it was scarcely with unmixed feelings of joy that at daybreak I contemplated the absolute necessity for starting afresh on a march back to where the luggage had been left. However there was no choice in the matter; the Queen's letters and all my papers were safe with us, but we knew that a delay of even a few hours might cost us all the rest of our baggage, arms, and presents. Mules, horses, and eight fresh men were soon ready, and with nothing to carry but a few small barrels of water and food for two days, Beech and I started again at a brisk pace at 7.30 a.m., leaving Hutchisson and the Aden boy to rest and recover from their exhaustion under the care of the Italian doctor.

Nothing worthy of record occurred on this journey; with the help of the men who had started on camels the night before we recovered most of our baggage and the presents, but a large quantity of dollars and nearly all the martini ammunition had already been carried off; a sufficient proof that if we had complied with the prayers of the doctor and Colonel Avvogado, and postponed our departure till later, hardly any of our property would have been recovered. The body of poor Ahmed Fehmy was also found, and sent back for burial at Monkullu. As my men were a little nervous and uneasy, owing to the reported presence in our immediate neighbourhood of an armed band of about fifty Arabs of the Assaorta tribe, we marched again an hour after midnight and returned to Monkullu without difficulty.

The state of my mouth and throat had not yet allowed me to swallow anything more solid than a little thin cold soup and some red wine, and I therefore felt obliged, to my regret, to take a complete rest for twenty-four hours before making a fresh start ; but I was well rewarded on rising late the following afternoon, by seeing Beech and Hutchisson eating, drinking, and smoking, and apparently in their usual good health, and by being able myself to swallow a few mouthfuls of solid food. The caravan was then quickly but carefully reorganized ; Ahmed Fehmy's place was filled by Bruru Worke, who had rejoined me after a very lame explanation of his non-appearance on the night of the 2nd, and by another young Abyssinian named Ghirghis, a bright looking youth, who had been educated by the Swedish Protestant Mission at Massowah : I engaged this youth as second interpreter, for Bruru Worke was only to go with me to King John and not to return. Our treacherous guides and mule drivers were replaced by nine fresh men, who all bore good characters, and whose wives and families were left in the hands of the Italian authorities as pledges for their good behaviour. By the evening of the 6th November everything was ready for a fresh start. In the meantime information had been received that Ras Alula was about to change his head-quarters from Gura to Asmara, I therefore decided to march this time direct to the latter place through Sahati, Ailet, and Ghinda.

At eight o'clock on the morning of the 7th we took a final leave of our kind Italian friends, a few of whom insisted on riding with us as far as Sahati,

and once more we crossed the sandy plain beyond the Italian forts, in good spirits, with good animals, and, apparently, a good and willing lot of men. In three hours we arrived at Sahati, a spot of some strategical importance on account of its never-failing supply of water, but desolate, uninhabited, and generally uninviting; beyond this place the Italian officers could not accompany us, so we rested here for a couple of hours, and then continued our journey alone, over the Ambabu Pass, and then down a short steep declivity on to the plain of Ailet.

We were now well within the country held by the Abyssinians, and we could only hope on nearing the large village or town in the centre of the plain, that we should not be mistaken for the head of an Italian column, and be received with a volley of musketry. It was not reassuring, when about half a mile distant, to see a great excitement and movement in the village, and then to make out a stream of fugitives—women and children—flying across the sand on the other side. Luckily, however, our pacific gestures and mild demeanor attracted the attention of a stalwart young shepherd, armed with the universal spear and shield; with the help of the almighty dollar he was soon convinced of the honourable nature of our intentions, and then flew across the plain like a young gazelle, waving his spear to his fellow townspeople and yelling the comforting word “Dahhân! dahhân!” (friends! friends!).

The panic in the town was soon allayed, those who had started to fly stopped to gaze, and from the bushes on our left suddenly emerged about thirty or forty Abys-

sinian soldiers all armed with Remington rifles, who quietly informed us that they had been running through the woods alongside of us for some distance, prepared to pour a volley into the caravan had our conduct appeared to them in the least degree suspicious or hostile. We thanked these gentlemen for their polite attention, and then rode on to greet the head man of the village. This dignified personage received us well, gave us food and milk, and forage for our beasts, but said that he would not be able to let us proceed on our journey next day, as the soldiers would not allow it. I should here explain that Ailet is practically an Arab village, though it contains a good many Abyssinian inhabitants, and though a garrison of Abyssinian soldiers is always quartered there to keep the Arabs in order, and to prevent them from becoming too prosperous. As a good deal of feasting and consequent excitement was going on among the soldiers, I thought I had better postpone any discussion till the following morning, and we therefore went quietly to bed, a simple proceeding which consisted in stretching ourselves on the sand, with a rolled great coat, or a saddle for a pillow.

At daybreak the following morning I gave orders for saddling and loading the animals, hoping that the soldiers would let us proceed quietly on our journey, but it soon appeared that matters were not to run so smoothly; a noisy and violent discussion ensued which lasted for over two hours, the soldiers saying that I must remain at Ailet till they could learn Ras Alula's wishes respecting us, while I argued that Ras Alula already knew that I was on the way to visit him,

and that he would be very angry with his men if they placed any impediment in my way. Eventually it was decided that I should be allowed to proceed to Ghinda, where there was a large garrison of Abyssinian soldiers, under a powerful chief, who should take the responsibility of deciding whether I was to be sent on to Ras Alula or not. About twenty soldiers of the Ailet garrison were told off to accompany us, and at 7.30 a.m. we were slowly wending our way through the mimosa thorns towards the high mountains which form the western boundary of the Ailet plain.

Throughout the day we were a good deal annoyed by the insolence of our Abyssinian guards, who amused themselves with mocking prophecies as to the fate which awaited us on our arrival at our destination, and who had a disagreeable habit of fingering, and then asking for, everything that struck their fancy, such as our knives, spurs, watches, and even our clothes. At length, however, after an arduous climb up a rocky mountainous road, we arrived at Ghinda soon after four o'clock, and bivouacked on a grassy plain about half a mile below the village, which is perched on the extreme summit of the most inaccessible hill in the neighbourhood. A couple of hours later a crowd of the red and white robes is seen descending the hill side in solemn procession, and advancing slowly towards us. A breathless messenger rushes up and warns me that the three great chiefs who command the 3000 men of this garrison are coming to pay me a visit. I receive the great men as best I can, and offer them seats on the grass or on rocks, while I thank them for their kindness in thus dropping in to see me at tea time.

Meanwhile their escort, consisting of about 150 fine men armed with rifles and swords, crowd round in somewhat unpleasant proximity, and proceed to make a searching examination of our clothes, especially of our boots and spurs, of our cooking pots, carbines, and in fact, of everything belonging to us. In spite of our efforts to be agreeable, the conversation between the Chiefs and ourselves soon begin to languish, I therefore told them outright that I regretted extremely that I should be obliged to tear myself away from this pleasant spot at a very early hour next morning, and to continue my journey to Ras Alula's Head Quarters. At the same time, in order to encourage them to see matters in a proper light, Beech occupied himself by offering beakers of raw brandy all round. The Chiefs then retired to a little distance to consult upon the important question of whether I was to go or to stay, while the soldiers of their escort remained with us, intensely excited by an air pillow which Hutchisson was alternately blowing out and emptying for their edification ; it was perhaps lucky for us that they did not understand the somewhat disparaging but pithy remarks by which this amusement was accompanied. While the consultation among the Chiefs was still proceeding, a messenger suddenly arrived with a letter to me from Ras Alula himself, in answer to my communication from Massowah. The Ras said that he would receive me at Asmara, and begged me to come on to him at once. So far the letter was civil, but the latter part of it consisted entirely of violent abuse of the Italians, which was less encouraging.

However, the immediate effect of this letter was to

convince the chiefs that not only must I be allowed to proceed unmolested, but that I should be treated as an honoured guest. We then said good night, and they departed, followed by their soldiers, with many expressions of good will and friendship. A few minutes later presents arrived, consisting of two sheep, which I did not want, and a most welcome jar of "tedge," a fermented drink made of honey, water, and an infusion of a bitter herb. The night was undisturbed, save by the incessant howling of jackals and hyænas, with an occasional roar from some larger and more savage animal. The hyænas once or twice caused a little anxiety by wandering about suspiciously near our hobbled mules, but the impertinence of these beasts is irritating, rather than alarming. At six o'clock the next morning I again received the Abyssinian chiefs, whose presence, with their soldiers, so impeded the work of my men, that it was not till eight o'clock that everything was packed on the mules, and that, after a liberal distribution of "backsheesh" to the great men, I was able to make a start along the mountainous and rocky passes leading up to Asmara.

As neither ourselves nor our beasts had as yet thoroughly recovered from the effects of our long waterless march of the week before, I consented to halt at 4 p.m. near some water at the foot of the Mahenzie Pass. Here we spent a cold but eventless night, and at daybreak next morning we were toiling painfully up the precipitous sides of the Mahenzie mountain, the last and highest of the great range which separates the Abyssinian plateau from the plains near the sea. At

eight o'clock we crossed its summit, about 8000 feet high, and half an hour later we rode into the great permanent camp of Ras Alula's army at Asmara.

I had sent Beech, with the interpreter Bruru, on ahead to announce the approach of the English Mission, but it soon appeared that Ras Alula himself was not here; he was expected to arrive the next day, and in the meanwhile his place was taken by his brother, a gentleman named Kantibwa Kaifa, who said he would be glad to see me at once. I therefore proceeded without delay to pay him a visit. Kantibwa received me sitting on a sort of throne, did not rise when I approached, but somewhat ostentatiously sniffed at a red handkerchief in his hand. He then motioned me to a chair placed several yards away on his left, and proceeded to speak in a condescending way, with his head turned away from me, and still smelling his red rag. It was very evident that he was trying to show off his own importance before the assembled crowd of chiefs and soldiers, so I cut the interview very short, and told him that I was sorry I could not stop, but that I would go on and meet Ras Alula at Gura. This rather frightened my friend, who then implored me to stay, swearing that the Ras would be here early next morning, and that if I met him on the road I should only have to turn back again with him to Asmara. However, I would not be persuaded, and once more we started along the road to Gura. After half an hour's march we were met by a mounted messenger from the Ras himself, who was ordered to beg me to wait at Asmara, where the great man promised to arrive early next day. This time

I allowed my heart to be softened, and we turned back again to Asmara, and pitched our camp on a grassy plain in the centre of the straggling collection of villages which compose this great camp. Late in the evening Kantibwa sent me a small present of bread and a miniature goat, but not the customary jar of tedge, nor any polite message. The nature of this present was intended to show that I was treated with contempt, and was merely allowed to remain at Asmara on sufferance till the great man should come and deal with me summarily.

During the night both my men and ourselves felt the change of climate severely. Asmara stands about 7600 feet above the sea level, and a little before daybreak the thermometer marked only 33° Fahrenheit, whereas, four days ago we had been gasping with the mercury at about 100° all night.

At ten o'clock in the morning of the 11th the beating of tom-toms and the shouts of the populace announced the approach of the great Ras Alula, and a few minutes later a vast crowd of cavalry and infantry, all dressed in the picturesque white and red toga, began to swarm into the plain, and to speed along towards the immense earthen or mud pyramid, on the summit of which are the two large round huts which constitute the Ras' Head Quarters, and from whence he looks down on the plain of Asmara like an eagle from his eyrie. No sooner had the Chief ascended to his abode than the great mass of armed humanity rapidly dispersed in every direction, and within half an hour the whole plain was dotted as far as the eye could reach, with little tents of coarse black cloth,

interspersed among thousands of hobbled cows, horses, and sheep ; while busy women and slaves flew about in every direction, fetching water, hunting for firewood, or tending their masters' horses and mules. Before eleven o'clock an escort of fifty soldiers came to take me to the presence of the Ras, whereupon I arrayed myself, to the wonder and edification of all beholders, in diplomatic uniform, cocked hat and all, and then, accompanied by the interpreter Bruru, and by Major Beech bearing the Winchester rifle, the procession advanced solemnly through a crowd of gaping brown faces and white robes till, after a trying climb up the mud pyramid, we were ushered into a large hut, in which sat Ras Alula on a divan, surrounded by about sixty or seventy Chiefs and dependants. He received me without rising from his seat, and after the interchange of a few formal greetings I presented the Winchester repeating rifle, with 800 rounds of ammunition. The Ras scarcely looked at it, but motioned to a slave to put the case containing it on the ground ; I then explained to the Ras that I had important business to transact with the King, and that it was very necessary that I should continue my journey immediately, but he replied that I could not go to-day, and that we should talk of all these matters next day.

This was annoying, as it necessitated a further delay, but on the whole, the interview had not been unsatisfactory ; the Chief's manner was not otherwise than courteous, while his evident intelligence and strength of character made him an object of considerable interest. I then returned to my tent, and shortly afterwards a string of slaves arrived there, bearing presents from the Ras,

consisting of two large jars of excellent and most welcome "tedge," a cow, 100 thin flat cakes of brown and black bread, a pot of honey, and a pot of "ghee" or native butter, in appearance and smell very like common train oil.

So far things had gone fairly well, and we fondly hoped that we should continue our journey on the morrow, but such, alas! was not to be the case, for my second interview, which took place at nine o'clock next morning, was very different from the first. Even before it took place the first mutterings of the storm had made themselves heard; we received an order that we were not to be allowed to camp on the plain any longer, that we must move into a hut which was placed at our disposal, and moreover that the move must take place immediately. As a large party of soldiers appeared to be ready, and only too willing, to enforce the mandate in a disagreeable way should we make any objection, I gave the necessary orders to my men under protest, and the tent was struck, the animals caught and loaded, and the whole party moved into a dark circular hut, rather larger than most native huts, built of thick branches, with a thatched roof coming down to about four feet from the ground. The only furniture it contained was a sort of divan, or altar of hard mud, about four feet long by three wide; while nearly half the whole space was railed off, and had evidently been till quite recently used as a stable for one or more animals. The hut was surrounded at a distance of about five yards by a high fence of thorns; in the space thus enclosed were crowded my men, mules,

and horses, and some of the baggage, while the hut itself was occupied by Beech, Hutchisson, myself, and the two interpreters, also, as we soon discovered, by thousands upon thousands of unwelcome and uninvited inhabitants, whose activity and rapacity drove away sleep, made life an intolerable burden, and loaded our consciences with almost as many wicked and bitter words and thoughts as did the subsequent conduct of our arch-enemy, Ras Alula himself.

I must, however, return to my second interview with the Ras in his eyrie, and here I think it will be sufficient simply to quote from the official report on the subject which was submitted to Her Majesty's Government in January.

"At my next interview the following morning the Ras asked me to tell him what I had come for, and what was the business I had to do with the Negoos. I was extremely unwilling to enter into any political discussion with the Ras, as it was easy to see that the acceptance by King John of the Italian terms would involve a repudiation on the part of His Majesty of any responsibility for the action of Ras Alula in regard to the massacre of the Italian half-battalion at Dogali, and would probably lead to his downfall, or at least to his removal to another province. I therefore restricted myself to saying that the mission with which I was intrusted was to the King himself, and I begged the Ras to enable me to accomplish it quickly. The Ras then said he knew I had come because of the Italians, and proceeded to speak with great excitement about the whole situation, saying that the Italians should come to Sahati only if he could go as Governor to Rome; that he had beaten them once, and if they advanced he would beat them again; that the sea was the natural frontier of Abyssinia, but that England, who pretended to be the friend of the Negoos, had given Massowah to the Italians. I at once protested strongly against this statement, and added that, in any case, Massowah would be of no use to Abyssinia, who had no fleet, and could not hold the place against even one ship of any European Power, and that surely it was better for his country that Massowah should be in the

hands of a Great Power who was willing, and even anxious, to be a friend to Abyssinia. The conversation continued in this strain a little longer, the Ras' manner throughout being most insulting and aggressive: he addressed me continually as if I were an Italian, and responsible for all Italian action, and after being obliged more than once to tell him that I was sent by the Queen of England alone, and had nothing to do with Italy, I again asked him to let me go on and carry out my mission to the King. This he flatly refused to do, and said I must wait at Asmara.

"A guard was then set over me and my people; we were not allowed to go out except accompanied by two soldiers; the inhabitants of Asmara were strictly forbidden to sell us provisions or goods of any kind whatever; no one was allowed to communicate with us either personally or by letter; visitors who wished to see me were roughly refused admittance by the soldiers, and their names were reported to the Ras; in a word, although nominally we were guests of Ras Alula, practically we were prisoners during the whole of our enforced stay in his camp. Every day I sent to the Ras to ask for guides and permission to start, but without effect, and on the 15th November I sent to demand another interview with him, which he fixed for daybreak next morning. I accordingly went to him at the appointed time, but was not received with any mark of respect; the people who were sitting or lying about in front of his hut refused to move out of my way, and it was only when I turned to go back again that I was begged to go on, and that a way was cleared for me through the crowd. I then repeated to the Ras that I was charged to take a letter, a message, and some presents from the Queen to the Negroes, and that if the Ras did not find it consistent with his duty to let me go forward, I begged that he would nominate some trustworthy person who should take charge of the letter and presents, and that he would let me return to Massowah to report why I had been unable to carry out my instructions. The Ras replied that I should neither go forward nor back for the present. I asked him whether he would stop me by force if I were to start to return to Massowah. He said, yes, that if I started to go either way he would have me brought back by his soldiers. Four days later, on the 19th November, I heard that the Ras had received a letter from the King about me, and shortly afterwards he sent for me, and told me that he would now let me go, but that I must first show him the Queen's and Lord Salisbury's letters, as he wished to see whether the seals were genuine. Although this was somewhat

insulting, I saw no great objection to complying with his request, and accordingly brought the letters to him. He merely looked at the seals on Her Majesty's letter, but that from Lord Salisbury he opened and handed to his interpreter in spite of my protests. Four hours later he returned the letter to me, and sent me three soldiers as guides for the journey. I then lost no time in leaving Asmara."

Although during these ten days of enforced inactivity at Asmara we had really been close prisoners, and thoroughly cut off from all communication with the outer world, we had not been subjected to any active ill-treatment at the hands of the Abyssinian soldiers guarding us, nor had there ever been any stinginess in the supplies of food sent for our consumption. Every morning a string of slaves used to arrive from head quarters driving a sheep before them and bearing several basketsful of thin flat circular loaves or "chupatties" of black bread, made, to judge by their taste, principally of fine black sand, mixed with grass stalks; there was always, too, a large jar of tedge, sometimes very good and very palatable, sometimes very bitter, but always preferable to the muddy water which was now our only alternative, our liquor supply consisting of only two bottles of brandy, which I determined to keep solely for medicinal purposes. But, in spite of these delicacies, it was with a feeling of the deepest relief that I at last heard that Ras Alula had received a letter from the King ordering him to let us proceed on our journey unmolested.

That this was a bitter disappointment to the Ras was no secret to us, for we, that is Beech and I, had known for several days that a letter had been sent to King John reporting our arrival, and explaining that

even if we were not Italians at least we came from the Italian camp, that England and Italy were hand in hand in all Massowah and Abyssinian policy, and urging that we should be summarily treated as enemies or spies, *i.e.*, thrown into chains, or executed without more delay or bother about the matter.

However, this was not to be; grumble as he might, Ras Alula dared not disobey the King's commands, so he assented to my request for a final interview, and we took leave of each other, not, it is true, with the best grace in the world, but I could pardon his somewhat brusque, not to say savage manner, in consideration of his disappointment, and because I felt that this parting was a wrench to his feelings; for he was indeed sorry to let us go, and a man never shows to advantage when his feelings are thus deeply touched.

It was a little after mid-day on the 19th of November when we marched out of Asmara in the track of our soldier guides. Our destination was uncertain, as the King was on the march from Dobra Tabor, either coming towards Adowa or to Ashangi; it was considered best, therefore, to march to Sokota, a town almost in the centre of Abyssinia, which would not be far from his road whether he was coming North or remaining in the Southern part of his dominions. Sokota lies almost due South from Asmara, distant, I calculated, about twelve days march; it was therefore, with a feeling of surprise not unmixed with suspicion, that I soon perceived that Ras Alula's soldier guides were leading us in a North-Westerly direction. It was with considerable annoyance that on arrival, after three hours march, at a small village,

I heard them declare that we must now halt for the night; and it was with real anger that I contemplated them sitting stolidly on a stone in the path and refusing to move a step further, declaring that their orders were to take us by slow and short journeys, "so that we should not be fatigued"! This was too much, so I told them I did not care a fig for their orders, that I intended to march when I liked and to halt when I chose, and that if they refused to come any further I would hire guides from the villages, but that in any case I would proceed. I added, that if I reached the King without them I would make it my first care to report their misconduct, and to see that they were severely punished—probably by the loss of their heads. At the same time I ordered the caravan to proceed, and we rode forward, followed by the now sulky soldiers, who, however, eventually succumbed to a little quiet "blarney," and led us to another village called Calcatti, where we arrived soon after sunset, and which should, according to the Ras' orders, have been our resting place for the following day.

Thoroughly tired by this march of seven and-a-half hours, after our enforced inactivity of ten days, no time was lost in unloading the mules, but no food was procurable in the miserably poor collection of huts of which the village consisted. Water was plentiful, and fortunately one of my men had been detailed to drive a cow with us all day. This cow had been one of the last gifts of our dear friend Ras Alula, but it had become very footsore, and had lagged behind for the last two or three hours. While waiting for its arrival fires were lighted, knives were sharpened, pots were prepared; probably,

never was a cow so welcomed as when this one at length limped into camp. In an instant the sturdiest of my men had the beast on the ground, one of them in particular earning the honoured title of the "Chief Butcher" by the alacrity with which he hacked and cut at the poor brute's throat, and exactly forty-one minutes from the time when the animal arrived in camp Beech, Hutchisson, and I, were trying to get our teeth through some well-cooked beefsteaks, while my men were devouring other portions prepared in a way peculiar to themselves.

By this time my men were becoming accustomed to each other and to Beech and myself; discipline was severe, but their obedience, as a rule, was implicit. I was, on the whole, well satisfied with them, and they seemed to have confidence in us. Our spirits were all high at having escaped from Ras Alula's clutches, and next morning, when we started along a smiling valley with a fairly good path leading due South towards Godoflassi, both men and mules seemed to be exhilarated by the beauty of the scenery and the freshness of the bright morning air, and the valley re-echoed with songs, laughter, and jests, as we marched along at a pace which thoroughly disgusted our soldier guides, and called forth dismal prophecies from them respecting the imminent death of all our mules and men too if we went on in this fashion.

At mid-day we crossed the Marab River for the first time; here it was a narrow but smooth and deep stream, very different from its appearance a hundred miles further. I called a halt for luncheon, and five

minutes later we were all splashing about in the river, enjoying the most delightful bathe I had ever experienced. On we went at the same swinging pace all through the afternoon, always in the midst of lovely scenery, a rich brilliant valley about three miles wide, shut in on both sides by bold rocky mountains covered with light green bushes, interspersed with the dark bluish-coloured india-rubber trees which were growing in thousands on the hill-sides. Two or three partridges and grouse, which were kind enough to fall to my gun in the course of the afternoon, removed any cause for anxiety as to our evening meal, while the men still had plenty of last night's cow, cut in thin strips and spread over some of the loads on the backs of the mules to dry in the sun.

A little before sunset we reached Godofelassi, pitched our camp, made ourselves and our mules thoroughly comfortable for the night, and then Beech and I sat for hours watching the magnificent progress of seven different thunderstorms simultaneously growling, crashing, and flashing in the mountains on every side.

By six o'clock next morning we were again on the march, and again we swung along at a good three and a half miles an hour along a fairly level track, which however gradually became more and more rocky and mountainous till, in the afternoon, some of our men and our soldier guides began to show signs of fatigue. At 3.30 p.m. we passed through the village of Addi Huala, the scene of a great battle in 1876 between the Abyssinians and the Egyptian forces under the late Prince Hassan, which resulted, as did all their battles, in the

total defeat, followed by the usual ghastly massacre and mutilation of the unfortunate Egyptians.

Here our soldier-guides insisted that we must halt, that Gundet was still many hours distant, and that there was no other possible camping ground or water attainable that evening. To these arguments I turned a deaf ear, my maps showed me that Gundet could not be more than ten miles distant, and, to the astonishment both of the soldiers and of my men, I declared that I knew exactly where Gundet was situated, and that I intended to camp there that night; at the same time I rode forward, ordering my people to follow. I knew that I ran no risk in thus preferring the evidence of the maps to the local knowledge of the guides, as this part of the country had been traversed by several European Missions, and was mapped out with very fair accuracy. But what the maps did not tell me was the nature of the country and the state of the road before us, and I nearly repented of my obstinacy when, an hour later, we suddenly found ourselves on the edge of a huge cliff frowning over a vast extent of apparently fertile country lying nearly 2000 feet below us. Down this precipice we had to go somehow; it was a difficult and hazardous business to undertake late in the afternoon with tired and heavily loaded mules, but at length, after much slipping and stumbling, shouting and swearing, we arrived without casualty in the plain below, and shortly afterwards halted and pitched our camp in a picturesque spot near a stream at the foot of a precipitous conical hill on which is perched the village of Gundet.

I should here explain that nearly all Abyssinian

villages are perched like rook's nests on the extreme summit of the most precipitous hill available, whether because they are thus less liable to the sudden attack of warlike neighbours, or because experience has shown that lions and panthers do not care to climb a precipice in order to get at the cattle, is a matter of surmise which the reader may settle to his own satisfaction.

At Gundet no supplies were obtainable, but a few grouse and partridges which I had shot on the road were amply sufficient for ourselves, while for the men there was a small skinful of flour which we had bought at Godoflassi in the early morning. Hutchisson was therefore soon engaged in making a wonderful "stew," in the cooking of which I would back him against any French "chef," but which had the serious drawback of requiring at least two hours preparation. The Chief Butcher had no occupation this night, but stood still, and with a sneer on his black countenance watched the proceedings of another man, surnamed the "Chief Baker," who was engaged in making bread in a manner peculiarly his own. His method consisted in heating several round stones about half the size of cricket balls, while he made the flour into dough, which he rolled out into a flat mass about an inch thick. A red-hot stone was then taken out of the fire and placed on the dough, which was at once rolled up all round the stone till it made a perfect ball. The whole ball was then put bodily into the fire, to be thoroughly baked or burnt outside by the flames or red-hot ashes, and inside by the hot stone. In less than five minutes the bread (!) was ready for consumption. The process was simple, and,

in default of any better, we stuck to this way of making bread during the rest of our sojourn in Abyssinia.

A miserably wet night was followed by a lovely morning, and shortly after daybreak everything was packed and ready for a start. We were now within about thirty-five miles of Adowa, the present capital of Abyssinia, and I wished very much to pass through that town, which lay on our road directly to the south, but the guides utterly refused to go there; they vowed that Ras Alula had given the strictest orders that we were not to be allowed to go to Adowa, and that if we insisted on going that way they would be severely punished, and we should feel the enmity of Ras Alula in a disagreeable way.

It appears that Ras Alula has a quarrel with the Great Chief who rules over Adowa, which is just outside the Ras' province, and therefore, rather than run the risk of getting mixed up in these personal quarrels, I consented to turn a little aside and to travel by the less known and more difficult paths across the mountains on the left of the Adowa road. At the same time I gave leave to Bruru Worke to ride on to Adowa to visit his relations who live there, telling him not to remain more than one day, and then to push on and catch us up on the road to Abbi Addy and Sokota. We then left the clearly defined path which leads to Adowa, and journeyed along a stony track, overgrown with bushes and thorns, till, in an hour or two, we found ourselves at the head of a descent to which our scramble of yesterday was a joke. The horrors of that mountain-side are still vivid in my mind, and, as I look back on it, I distinctly see the

depressing picture of my unfortunate caravan. Here a willing mule, caught by its loads, being jammed between two rocks ; here another, with both its hind legs over the edge of a precipice, and a yelling Arab trying to pull him up again by the bridle ; another refusing absolutely to slide down an incline, and listening stolidly alike to the blandishments and the curses of its driver ; while on every side boxes were being smashed and packages torn to ribbons by the sharp corners of projecting rocks, the chief sufferer being Hutchisson, who came at the end of the procession picking up most of his kit on the road along which it was being strewn like the "scent" in a paper chase, the valise containing it having been smashed to atoms against a rock ; but the animal whose fate was the hardest was the unfortunate mule carrying the King's great telescope, the deal case of which projected a good deal, and continually "hung up" the wretched beast to rocks and thorn trees, or else overbalanced him and sent him rolling down the side of the mountain, until his course was arrested by a friendly obstacle. However all things must have an end, and at length the whole party was collected in the plain below, and halted for an inspection of damages. These turned out not to be so very serious after all ; so on we went along an open level plain teeming with game, and with the most beautiful and brilliant coloured birds of every size and kind, from the white vulture overhead to the lovely lyre bird darting from tree to tree.

At noon we again crossed our former acquaintance, the Marab River, now grown to a more important size ; and shortly afterwards it became evident that our guides

knew nothing of the road, and that we were aimlessly wandering to and fro. Three times that afternoon we crossed and recrossed the Marab, till a little before five o'clock we came in sight of a small village on the top of a big hill. Here we halted for the night, and engaged a local guide for the morrow, our soldier-guides having confessed that they were strangers to this part of the country.

Leaving this village (by name Haddish Addi) at daybreak next morning, the 23rd November, we crossed the Gomgrim River at 9.30 a.m., passed through Addi Mariam at 10.30, halted for an hour in a pleasant meadow near a stream, had a violent altercation with the soldier-guides, who insisted that we should halt for the day at Addi Heptomaria at 2.30 p.m., and finally compelled them sulkily to follow us to the Addi or village of Shahagni, where we pitched our camp just before sunset at the foot of a magnificent black mountain, in appearance and shape very like the Matterhorn, called Semayata, the highest peak of the great Debra Sina and Selida ranges.

But enthusiastic admirers of fine scenery as we were, what chiefly attracted our attention at this moment was the question of food. We soon discovered that beyond a bowl of sour milk, absolutely nothing in the way of supplies was procurable at this little mountain village. We had seen no game on the road during the day, and though the men still had some flour for themselves, we had nothing but a bag of broken ship's biscuit—hardly a satisfying meal for three hungry men after a long and hot day's march. From force of habit Hutchisson had

lighted a fire, and was gazing disconsolately into his empty pots ; Beech and I were getting out the gun and a few cartridges, but with hardly any hope of shooting anything in the fifteen or twenty minutes of daylight that still remained, when some one pointed out a couple of small green birds on the top of a big tree close to us. I thought they were parrots, and at first was unwilling to shoot them, but was soon persuaded, and down they came. Hutchisson seized upon them with delight, and explained that they were not parrots but "green pigeons," which his Indian experience had taught him were excellent food. Two more of these birds were then good enough to come and perch on the same tree ; they were promptly shot sitting, followed their companions into the pot, and completed their earthly career by affording us a most excellent though modest repast.

After a wet night, during which terrific thunderstorms had roused the echoes in the mountains all round us, we marched again at daybreak on the 24th, round the base of Semayata, till at nine o'clock we got a magnificent bird's-eye view of Adowa, lying far below in a plain to the west. At mid-day we halted in a grassy meadow, through which flowed the Seisa, bright and clear as a Hampshire trout stream. Here I shot a beautifully marked wild goose, about twice the size of an English goose, with a dark green back, white, red and yellow breast, and red eye. In the afternoon we lost a good deal of time and our tempers by being again led wrong by the soldier-guides ; but at length we struck into the so-called "King's Road," running from Adowa to Abbi-Addy, a clearly-defined path some twelve feet wide, and

cleared of all big rocks and thorn bushes. Along this road we marched merrily past the villages of Abba Grima and Logumti to Gelrot, where we halted at 6.15 p.m. Again there was a difficulty about obtaining provisions ; for ourselves the goose was more than sufficient, but my Mussulman Arabs would rather starve than touch any of it, and I began to get a little anxious about them, as they had lived on nothing but their heavy indigestible bread for some days, and the marches had been long and severe. However there was no help for it, and again they went supperless to bed.

Just as we were about to resume the march at six o'clock the following morning, two messengers arrived with a letter for me, and a most welcome present of a cow from the chief man of Adowa, who rejoices in the jaw-breaking name of Betwaded Gebrameskal. This gentleman civilly expressed his regret that I had not passed through Adowa on my journey south, and added that he had sent orders along the road to ensure our being well treated and supplied with provisions as long as we were within the limits of his jurisdiction. This was polite and no doubt well-meant, but it did us little practical good, as we were already within fifteen miles of the extremity of his province. However, I wrote a suitable reply, full of compliments and hopes that I should make his acquaintance on my return from the King. This was quickly translated into Amharic by the interpreter, Ghirghis, and the messengers having been made happy by a liberal "backsheesh" of dollars, the order was given to advance, and once more we were travelling due south along a fairly good path.

After only three hours march we reached a small village, where our soldier-guides said we must stop for the day; they vowed that no more water would be procurable for at least a whole day's march, and that the road became desperately bad. Again I had recourse to the maps, and feeling convinced after a careful study that the Mai (or river) Weri could not be more than about three and a half or four hours distant, I absolutely refused to halt. The guides with equal obstinacy refused to advance, so I left them behind and continued the march without them, feeling tolerably confident that we should not have much difficulty in keeping to the right path, and knowing that the river lay due south of us, running from east to west. I could see, however, that my men, hungry as they were, were a little uneasy at the idea of continuing our march without any guides at all, and, although there was no sign of disobedience or insubordination, it was considered advisable for Beech and Hutchisson to fall into their allotted places at the end of the caravan to keep the party together. After another hour's march the heat became very great, and, although the road was not really very bad, the constant succession of hills and valleys were wearisome and exhausting; our thirst, without being absolutely painful, soon became more acute than was pleasant, and I confess that unwelcome memories of our experiences on the 2nd of November made me keep a very sharp and rather anxious look out for any sign that might denote the proximity of a river.

In two hours we left the hills and began to cross a flat sandy plain, covered with mimosa thorns, where the

heat became even more oppressive than before ; three and a half hours had elapsed since we parted with the guides, and I had promised water to my men in less than four hours ; we had been over six and a half hours on the march, and I was sorry to see that the pace was getting slower and slower, that all conversation among the men had long ceased, and that we were now plodding painfully along in silence. To encourage them I told the men I was absolutely certain that water was now quite close, but at the same time I devoutly hoped that the maps had not made a mistake of ten miles or so in the position of the river. Beech and I then rode ahead to some distance from the party, and at length to our joy and relief we suddenly heard the rushing of water, and found ourselves on the edge of a cliff looking down on a fine clear stream, rushing, tumbling, and foaming over rocks and boulders about fifty feet below us. We soon found a way down to the water, and conveyed the news back to the caravan, taking care to remind them that I had promised water within four hours, and that I had brought them to it in three hours and fifty minutes.

This morning's work had an excellent effect in increasing the confidence of the Arabs in ourselves and in our maps, while the Abyssinian soldier-guides, when eventually they sulkily rejoined us, looked upon our knowledge of this country, which we had never seen before, as bordering on the supernatural. Ten minutes later mules were unloaded, and black men, white men and animals were all rolling, swimming and splashing about in the clear rushing water, to the surprise and

apparently the disgust of a staid and elderly Abyssinian priest who was comfortably eating his luncheon on the opposite bank.

As the morning's march had been severe, a rest of an hour and three-quarters was allowed by the Weri River, and then on we went, climbing over a succession of lofty hills of the Temben range, till at 6.45 p.m. we camped at the village of Svandas, to which, as we were very short of provisions, I thought it advisable to ascend, although it is situated on a high precipitous hill, about a mile and a half to the left of the main road. It was quite dark when we reached a suitable camping ground near the village, and one of our mules had to be literally pushed and half carried up the hill, and then fell like a log, apparently dying, when he reached the top; but we were glad to find that plenty of supplies were forthcoming, including good barley for the mules, and flour, tedge and a sheep for the men and ourselves. With truculent glee the chief butcher prepared for action: with a piece of flat sandstone under his brawny arm he came to borrow Beech's long hunting knife, which he proceeded to sharpen, sitting as he did so alongside the sheep, his intended victim, which he had tied to the stone on which he sat. In a few minutes that sheep was mutton, and half an hour later the greater part of it was no longer even that. A hearty meal thoroughly restored the somewhat drooping spirits of the men, the oldest of them in particular, who had been rather lame and very despondent all day, now winning the applause of all beholders by the execution of a *pas seul*, which would have done credit to the boards of Drury Lane. This respectable old gentle-

man indeed "came out" so strongly on this occasion that he earned the title of the "Grand Old Man," a *sobriquet* which on many subsequent occasions he showed to be well-merited.

Refreshed in mind and body we were off again at daybreak next morning, the sick mule being so far recovered as to be able to keep up with us, though of course unencumbered by saddle or load. Leaving the village of Sarasa to our left three hours later, we descended to a plain intersected in every direction by dry watercourses. At 11.30 a.m. we passed the village of Takherakiro, a wretched place, quite unworthy of the prominence given to it on the map, but which we were told had recently been destroyed by fire. At 12.15 we rode through the large village of Abergullie, which scarcely does credit to its Scotch-sounding name, and twenty minutes later we turned sharp to the left, under some overhanging cliffs, and found ourselves at Abbi Addy, where I decided to halt for the rest of the day, the mules showing some signs of exhaustion from their long marches during the past week. This day being market day at Abbi Addy, hundreds of people were arriving from every part of the country, bringing their merchandise for disposal, or in many cases only to gossip and to hear the news. The chief articles of commerce appeared to be bars of rough salt, about ten inches long and two wide. These bars of salt form the ordinary currency in the centre and southern parts of Abyssinia, where money is often found to be absolutely useless. I therefore bought nearly a mule-load of salt, the bars being sold at the rate of eighteen or twenty to

the dollar. We also bought a good supply of corn for the mules, who were badly in want of it ; and during the afternoon the chief butcher was made happy by the loan of Beech's knife, with which he performed his usual operation on the cow which had been sent us by the Governor of Adowa.

The Governor of Abbi Addy and of the surrounding province, who is called Tekla Haimanot, sent his compliments and a present of tedge and bread ; I succeeded in shooting a brace of wild geese and a large partridge, and altogether we retired to rest that night happy and refreshed. In the course of the night Bruru Worke reappeared, tired, sulky, and knowing that he had greatly exceeded the extent of leave I had given him. However, I did not reprove him, but both Beech and I noticed a distinct change in his manner towards us ; his visit to his own people seemed to have driven away all the effects of his English education, and he was once more in feeling and sympathy a semi-savage Abyssinian ; but it was not till long afterwards that we found out to our cost the full extent of this change in him.

Hearing that the King was still on the road between Dobra Tabor and Ashangi, we decided to continue our march to Sokota, and at dawn next morning we were again travelling South ; in six hours we halted for an hour by the Gueva or Guibbeh river, which we then crossed without difficulty, and proceeded to climb for about 2500 feet over the Teraque Pass, and marched among mountains of granite and marble till sunset, when we camped in a valley among the Abergullie mountains, where there was plenty of grass for the animals, the men

having a good supply of food for themselves. Our soldier-guides had again been very obstructive, and had tried to delay us, but they had now a healthy dread of my maps, and their opposition became less determined as they found that it had no effect.

On the 28th we still continued our southerly course over mountains and valleys from sunrise till eleven o'clock, when we descended into a level plain full of game. Here we lost our way, and wandered about for some time looking for a path; Beech and I, who had stopped a little behind to shoot, also lost the caravan, but, after the waste of about an hour, and after much shouting and blowing of horns, and climbing of high rocks to scan the plain, we all got together again, passed through the village of Bellis, where the inhabitants were all busily occupied in burying their late head man in a corn field, and on over some low but rocky hills whence there was a magnificent view of the snow-capped mountains of Semen, lying West-South-West, and of the Womberat mountains to the South-East.

At 4.30 we arrived at Fenaroa, where I halted, as two of the men were ill. I administered quinine to each of them, but found that one had already been doctored by his comrades, who had "bled" him in a way peculiar to themselves: that is, they had tied cords tightly round both his legs just below the knee, and then proceeded to hack at his calves with their knives, making about fifteen gashes on each leg. Whether it was the result of this treatment or of my quinine I cannot say, but next day this unfortunate man appeared to be seriously ill, and could not walk a yard, though he was able to sit still on a mule all day.

As the guides said we were at some distance from water, and as none had been obtainable for the mules at Fenaroa, I roused the camp at 2.30 a.m., and we marched at three, by the uncertain light of the moon shining fitfully in a somewhat clouded sky. As long as we were in the open country this moonlight march was in every way delightful, but when after an hour or so we entered a forest, consisting principally of Mimosa thorns through which the light could not penetrate, our clothes, hands and faces suffered severely, and on our arrival, about sunrise, at the banks of the Samri River, a spectator would have imagined that we had all been engaged in a desperate combat with an army of cats. Having forded the Samri we continued to march West and South-West through a magnificent forest of fine timber trees, teeming with game of every sort, till at about nine o'clock we arrived at the banks of the Tsellari River, the largest and most rapid stream we had yet seen. For a great part of the year this river is so swollen by the tropical rains that all communication between the Northern and Southern parts of Abyssinia is rendered almost impossible. For two hours we travelled along the right bank in a Southerly direction, till at eleven o'clock we found a fordable place across which we struggled, the mules being almost carried off their legs by the force of the water.

During our mid-day halt a careful study of the maps convinced me that they could no longer be depended upon now that we had left the track of all former travellers. The position of Fenaroa, the course of the Samri and Tsellari Rivers, and, as far as I could judge,

the situation of Sokota, were all wrongly marked, and I was therefore compelled to trust entirely to the good faith of our guides. All through the afternoon we toiled painfully up a rough torrent bed, passing at about four o'clock through the most weirdly picturesque spot it has ever been my good fortune to see, even in this country of extraordinary scenic effects. This wonderful place, Mai Shegalo by name, reminded us so forcibly of a scene out of "Rip Van Winkle," that neither Beech nor I would have been surprised to see devils and goblins issuing from the fantastic trunks of the enormous trees, or peering at us from the numerous caves and crevices in the rugged and broken cliffs. The scene consisted of a flat space about 200 yards square, completely roofed in by the thick foliage of huge "Shegalo" trees, a kind of fruit-bearing sycamore, and enclosed on every side by rugged precipitous cliffs rising perpendicularly for 200 or 300 feet. Even the powerful tropical sun was unable to throw a ray of light to warm or enliven this gloomy spot; the dramatic effect of which was completed by a small encampment of wild fierce-looking natives of the hills, collected, with their equally wild-looking cattle, round a small pool of water which trickled out of the frowning black precipice. Not quite liking the looks of these gentry, I shouted to my men to keep well together, but when we heard my words echoed and re-echoed from cliff to cliff till they died away in the mountains thousands of feet above our heads, I think we were all thoroughly persuaded that there was something "uncanny" about the place, and the jaded mules were hurried forward with shouts and blows till at last we emerged again into

the cheerful sunlight. Here one of the mules stopped, completely exhausted, and as, even after having been relieved of his load and his saddle, he was still unable to keep up with us, we left him to his fate, which would probably be to fall an easy victim to the first lion or panther which might happen to scent him that evening. At last, after a desperately steep and heart-breaking climb over the neck of Mount Ombeddi, more than 10,000 feet in height, we found a suitable camping ground and halted, after a long march of fourteen hours, nearly all the way up hill, and over a rough, broken, and sometimes almost impracticable path. That night Beech and I concealed ourselves for nearly an hour under a tree a little distance from the camp, in hopes of getting a shot at a lion who was grunting and growling quite close to us, but unfortunately the beast saw us before we could see him, and we never got a chance of a fair shot. The two sick men then demanded my attention ; I was sorry to be obliged to acknowledge that the doses of quinine last night had not done much good, I therefore varied the treatment this evening, and gave Cockles' pills to one of them, and a strong dose of chlorodyne to the other. This turned out more successfully, at all events, neither of them asked for any more medicine.

Next day, the 30th, we continued our march at daybreak, till at two p.m. we arrived at Sokota, which lies in reality about thirty miles to the South-West of the position in which it is marked on the maps. Men and mules being thoroughly tired, I announced that we would rest till the following day, and then went to visit the chief man of the town, who is also ruler of the whole surrounding province.

This gentleman, Dejat Gongool by name, received me without rising from his seat, and was by no means civil, and so, after a short conversation, in the course of which he told me that no Englishman, and only one white man, a priest, had ever been to Sokota, I said good-bye and returned to camp. Mr. Gongool's idea of European civilization was a little vague, his first remark to me being a question as to whether there were horses and guns in the country from which I came. He was a good deal surprised at hearing that we had these blessings in England, and then asked whether all Englishmen were as big as myself, upon which I gravely assured him that I was considered very small in my own country.

Hearing that the King would be near Lake Ashangi in three days, I determined to proceed direct to Wofela, on the southern shore of that Lake. From Sokota to this place I was informed that there were two roads, one of them, the "King's Road," being smooth and fairly good, but very circuitous, while the other was straight but more mountainous. After some consultation I elected to go by the "straight" road, which soon turned out to be the most tortuous and erratic that we had yet seen even in Abyssinia. For three days we travelled first South-East, and then North-East, without any particular adventures, but encountering some difficulty in getting supplies and forage, till on the night of the 3rd of December we halted about two miles from the King's camp, into which it would have been a dangerous breach of *étiquette* to arrive so late in the evening. During these three days Ras Alula's soldier-guides had been very

troublesome and obstructive, and had on one occasion even incited all the inhabitants of a village to turn out and forcibly prevent our further progress. They had also tried to prevent the country people from selling us any provisions, or, what was still more important, corn for the mules; luckily, however, the sight of a bag of shining dollars had a greater effect than even the universal dread of the soldiery.

On halting on the evening of the 3rd, I sent on one of the interpreters and a guide into the King's camp to warn the King and the brother of Ras Alula of my proximity. This latter person, by name Dejat Tesemma, was to be our "Balderabba" or host during our stay in the King's camp. The office of "Balderabba" is that of a sort of agent of communication between the stranger and the chief in whose camp he is a visitor. Our "Balderabba" was responsible for our safety, and was also charged to see that we did not escape from the King's camp without permission.

IN THE KING'S CAMP.

At last at nine o'clock on the morning of the 4th of December we rode into the camp of the King of the Kings of Ethiopia, and a wonderful sight it was. As far as the eye could reach the plain was thickly dotted with small black tents and with little grass huts; tens of thousands of horses, mules, and cows were grazing on every side, while the whole district seemed to be alive with moving swarms of armed men, and of women and

slaves. In the centre of the plain were two large circular white tents, standing in an open space, inclosed by a paling covered with red cotton cloth; these were the Head Quarters of the great King Johannis. On arrival in the camp we were met by a messenger, who informed me that to-day being Sunday the King would not see me, but that he would do so at Ashangi, whither he intended to proceed at daybreak next day. We were then conducted to an open space where we were told we might pitch our camp, and soon afterwards arrived a string of slaves bringing the presents of the King, in the shape of bread, tedge, red pepper, and a cow.

Although immensely relieved at having at last arrived at my destination, I was made a little uncomfortable on hearing from Bruru, whom I had sent to pick up information at the King's Head Quarters, that a letter had very recently been received by the King from Ras Alula, warning him against me, and saying that English troops were coming to join the Italians in an expedition against Abyssinia, and that my mission was only a pretext for gaining time; Ras Alula therefore urged that I should be treated as an enemy rather than as a friend. This was not very pleasant, as to be "treated as an enemy" in Abyssinia has only one signification,—to be got rid of without further delay either by bullet or spear.

In order to avoid the immense crowds which would block the path to Ashangi as soon as the sun rose, we left the camp at Wofela at about 2.30 a.m., and marched steadily round the western shore of the Ashangi Lake till we arrived close to the village of that name. Here we took up our position in a field at a little distance from

the road which the King and his army would follow, and then for four hours we watched the quickly-moving stream of humanity, with their thousands of animals pressing along the road to Ashangi, not in twos or threes, nor even in companies and battalions, but in one interminable unbroken throng. Beech and I made a most careful calculation of the numbers of persons who marched past us that morning, counting first the numbers who passed a certain spot in a minute, and then taking the time in which the whole army passed ; at a very low estimate we calculated the numbers to be not less than between 70,000 and 80,000 persons. About the middle of the throng rode the King himself, surrounded by a picked body of cavalry. He was mounted on a handsome mule, and was dressed in the usual Abyssinian red and white "shamma," or toga, a fold of which concealed all the lower part of his face, the only distinguishing mark of Royalty being the fact that he kept the rays of the sun from his august head with a red silk umbrella. We afterwards learnt that the greater part of this immense force was composed of the army of Ras Michael, a Galla Chieftain, formerly a Mussulman, Mehemet Ali by name, but who had been forcibly persuaded to embrace the Abyssinian Christianity by command of King John at the head of a successful army.

The main body of the King's own army was advancing towards the North-Eastern frontier by way of Semen and Adowa, under the command of the King's son, Ras Aria Selassi, there being with His Majesty only about 5000 picked men as a body guard ; but as each of these 5000 men was accompanied by a wife and probably

one or two slaves, the number of mouths to feed was out of all proportion to the fighting capabilities of the force. Hardly had the King entered the large hut reserved for him on the top of a hill at Ashangi than a breathless messenger came to inform me that His Majesty would receive me at once. I had, therefore, to change my clothes, and put on all my diplomatic finery in the middle of a crowd in an open field, modesty causing me to improvise a sort of shelter by making some of my men spread out their togas and other garments all around me ; then, accompanied by Bruru the interpreter, and by Beech, and with two or three men bearing the presents, I solemnly rode up to present the Queen's letters to His Majesty Johannis, who calls himself King of the Kings of Ethiopia, and King of Zion. We found this august personage sitting on a dais in a large hut, surrounded by about fifty or sixty Abyssinian Chiefs. He was dressed in a white cotton "shamma," a fold of which entirely concealed the lower part of his face, nothing but a pair of shrewd-looking black eyes being visible ; on his head was a small gold diadem or coronet, and by his side, on his dais, were his sword and a carbine, typical emblems of the means by which his authority is maintained. Having solemnly shaken His Majesty's outstretched hand, I made him a polite little speech, expressing the hope of the Queen of England that his health was good, and assuring him that all England took the greatest interest in the welfare of Abyssinia and of its King. I then presented to him the letters from the Queen and from Lord Salisbury, with the translations made by my interpreters ; these he handed to his own

interpreter for future perusal. Beech then came solemnly forward, and laid at His Majesty's feet the two swords of honour, the Winchester rifle, the merits of which I briefly explained to him, and lastly, the magnificent but complicated telescope, in its handsome mahogany case, which had been the cause of so much anxiety and bad language during our long and arduous journey. I tried to expatiate upon the wonderful virtues of this telescope, and told him that not only could he see things through it at a great distance on the earth, but that it would shew him mountains and all sorts of wonders in the moon and stars. His Majesty did not seem to care so much about this, and asked simply whether it would show him a man plainly before that man got within rifle shot; he was apparently much pleased when I assured him that it would; and I imagine that he looked forward with pleasure to having the first shot at his enemies.

The interview then came to an end, and I returned to my people, to find that, during our absence, one of the mules, carrying, among other things, the last remnants of our luxuries in the shape of preserved milk, cocoa, and tobacco, had in the meanwhile fallen head over heels with its loads down a precipice. Marvellous to relate, the beast was not much the worse, but of course the boxes on its back were reduced to matchwood. The loss of the last remnant of our small stock of tobacco was a terrible misfortune; we had for sometime past put ourselves on a strict allowance of four pipes a day, but now even that was denied to us, and misery stared us in the face. We despaired of being able to purchase any in Abyssinia, as, by a recent decree, the king

acting under the influence of the priests, had absolutely forbidden the use of tobacco in his country, either for smoking purposes, or for taking as snuff, to which the Abyssinians were much addicted. The punishments for disobedience to this decree were severe but characteristic; any man convicted of smoking was condemned to have his lips cut off, snuff-taking entailed the loss of the nose. We met more than one unfortunate wretch who had recently undergone this brutal punishment, and whose ghastly nose-less face was a warning to all beholders against becoming a slave to these small vices. Luckily for us, the discipline among the wild Gallas in the camp of Ras Michael was less severe, and two days later we were able to purchase a plentiful supply of coarse yellow native tobacco, which, after all, was not so bad as it looked.

In the afternoon, after my reception by the King, I went to pay a visit to our "Balderabba" or host, Dejat or Dejaj Tesemma, the brother of Ras Alula, who was established in a large tent close to our camp. I was agreeably surprised to find him a pleasant and gentlemanlike individual, very different both in appearance and manner from his powerful and brutal brother at Asmara.

I should here explain that the title of "Dejaj" or "Dejat" confers a considerable rank on its possessor, although it is inferior to the title of "Ras" or Commander-in-Chief. The highest title in the Abyssinian Empire next to that of "Negoos" or King, is that of "Wakshem." There are but two Wakshems in Abyssinia, both created by the King, and that number is

never exceeded. The two fortunate possessors of the title at the present moment rejoice in the names of Wakshem Boru and Wakshem Gabru, both of them very powerful chieftains, disposing of well-armed and formidable armies. These Wakshems have various privileges not accorded to ordinary mortals ; among other things they have the right of sitting to eat at the same little gold table as the King himself. Wakshem Boru, who is the father of my sulky friend Gongool of Sokota, was at this moment with the King ; Wakshem Gabru, with his army, was accompanying the King's Son, Ras Aria, on the march with the main body of the Royal forces *viâ* Semen and Adowa.

Next in order of precedence comes the "Ras" or Commander of an army, he is also as a rule Governor of a province. Then comes the "Dejaj," whose dignity really, like all others in this country, depends on the number of men of whom he can dispose. My friend, Dejaj Tesemma for instance, was followed by about 3000 well-armed soldiers, whom he could call his own, though he himself was a "King's-man," and was under the direct orders of His Majesty. Another Dejaj, whose acquaintance I made could boast of barely ten followers. "Basha" is another title very common in Abyssinia, but which conveys no very clear idea of power. I have seen one "Basha" at the head of 1000 stalwart riflemen, while some others exercised a doubtful authority over five or ten half-naked spearmen.

Lastly there comes the "Lij," or "Esquire," who has not as yet by bravery in war or in the chase earned the right to bear any more distinguished title. I say advisedly

“bravery in war or in the chase,” for there is a regular sliding scale of bravery by which certain distinctions are earned. For instance, the man who slays a lion single-handed, earns the same “kudos” as though he had killed five men in battle ; he becomes moreover entitled to wear little gold ornaments in his ears, and on great occasions fastens a strip of the lion’s mane round his head. The hunter, who alone kills an elephant, acquires equal glory with the conqueror of ten human enemies : he wears a gold ornament on his forehead, and on “full-dress days,” a long yellow scarf bound round his head with the ends flying behind. The soldier who has actually accounted for ten enemies on the battle field is entitled to rivet a broad silver band round the leathern scabbard of his sword ; some brave veterans whom I saw, had apparently accounted for about half a company of men, as they had as many as four or five of these silver bands on their scabbards. No doubt, though, two or three elephants would help to bring up the score very quickly, and the lion in these days of fire-arms is no longer the same formidable enemy as when he had to be tackled in hand-to-hand combat and slain with a sword or spear.

Contrary to expectation I was not sent for by the King next day, the 6th December, but Beech went at His Majesty’s request, to show some of the people at the Court how to work the big telescope. On his arrival at the King’s hut he was taken into His Majesty’s presence, and was received in the most civil manner, the royal face being now uncovered, though the royal person was still sitting cross-legged on a dais like a life-size statue of Buddha.

It was not till 9 a.m. on the 7th that I was summoned to explain to the King the object of my Mission. I went again in all the gold lace and finery that I could put on, and on my arrival at the royal hut all the other occupants were turned out of it except the King's own interpreter, a brother of my man Bruru, who had been educated at Bombay, and the chief Treasurer, an intelligent looking young man named Marcia. The King uncovered his face, shook hands cordially, and then asked me what was the message which I had brought from Queen Victoria. The particulars of this interview have been fully published in a Parliamentary paper, and for the purpose of this narrative it is sufficient to quote *verbatim* from the official report.

“On the 7th I went again by appointment to the King, and found myself alone with His Majesty, the interpreters, and the Chief of the Treasury. I then communicated to His Majesty the document, of which I have the honour to enclose a copy herewith, and which will, I trust, meet with the approval of Her Majesty's Government. I had caused it to be most carefully translated under my personal supervision by two interpreters, and when I handed it, with the translation, to His Majesty, I begged him to allow his own interpreter to make a most careful comparison between the original and the translation. You will observe that in this document I was most careful to avoid any expression which might be galling to the Abyssinian national pride, that I insisted strongly that the sole motive of Her Majesty the Queen in sending me to Abyssinia was one of friendship for that country; and, finally, that I omitted any mention of the first of the Italian conditions, which insists on a letter being written by the King expressing his deep regret for the unjustifiable massacre of last January. I felt myself justified in doing this, as I was confident that if I could persuade the King to accept the remaining terms, including the cession of practical advantages to Italy, there would be little difficulty in getting him to write a letter which would contain some expression of regret sufficient to fulfil the Italian requirements.

“His Majesty read over the translation himself, and then caused his interpreter to read it aloud; he then turned to me and said, ‘I can do nothing of all this. By the Treaty made by Admiral Hewett, all the country evacuated by the Egyptians on my frontier was ceded to me at the instigation of England, and now you come to ask me to give it up again.’ I ventured to point out that in Admiral Hewett’s Treaty no mention is made of Sahati or Wia, that His Majesty had already accepted the occupation by the Italians of Massowah and Monkullu, and that Sahati and Wia were necessary for the protection of that town and of the trade road to and from the sea. The King replied, ‘I did not give them Massowah; England gave it to the Italians, but I will not give them an inch of land. If they cannot live there without Sahati, let them go; and as for Senhit, it is mentioned in the Treaty, and England cannot ask me to give it up.’ I explained, as I had explained to Ras Alula, that England did not give Massowah to the Italians; but that, at the same time, it was an advantage to Abyssinia that they should be there.

“After some more conversation, during which the King repeated that he would give up nothing, and would make no Treaty that was not a confirmation of that made with Admiral Hewett, I offered to withdraw altogether the clause about Senhit; but His Majesty replied that this made no difference, as he would grant nothing entailing the cession of an inch of land, that Massowah itself was his by right, and that he had neither the intention nor even the power to alienate any territory which properly belonged to Abyssinia.

“I then remarked that the whole population of England, of Italy, and, indeed, of all the civilized world, had been surprised and made indignant by the news of the massacre at Dogali; but that it was well known that this action had not been dictated by His Majesty, and that it would be with the deepest regret that the Queen, and the world at large, would learn that he assumed the responsibility for the massacre of those 450 men. I even went so far as to hint that I thought—though I added that I was not authorised to say so—that if Ras Alula were appointed to some other province not on the frontier, some of the difficulties in the way of peace might, perhaps, be removed. To this the King answered, ‘Why do you speak of 450 men? There were 5000 Italians who were beaten by 5000 Abyssinians.’ I replied that perhaps that may have been the report which reached His Majesty, but that there was no possible doubt—and it could easily be proved

—that there were not 500 Italians engaged in the action of that day, and that it was a massacre rather than a fight. His Majesty then continued : ‘Ras Alula did no wrong ; the Italians came into the province under his governorship, and he fought them, just as you would fight the Abyssinians if they came into England.’ I said that no nation in Europe would commit a massacre of that sort.

“I then reiterated the hope of the Queen that for the sake of his own country he would consent to some terms of peace, and I asked if he would suggest to me what he would accept. He replied that he would like to have peace ; that it was true that war was a bad thing for his country, and especially a war against other Christians ; but that he would not give up Sahati, Wia, nor land of any sort, and that the only Treaty he would make with Italy would be a confirmation of the Treaty of 1884.

“Seeing that it was useless to say any more for the present, I begged His Majesty distinctly to understand that it was purely out of friendship to Abyssinia that the Queen had sent me ; that Her Majesty was deeply sorry to see Abyssinia engaged in a great war with a very powerful European nation, and wished to do all in her power to avert it. His Majesty answered that England was his only friend, and that he was the Queen’s servant, but that he would have nothing to say to the Italians so long as they ask for land ; that the Queen had written to tell him that Italy was very powerful, but that he was strong also ; that the right was on the side of Abyssinia, and the issue of the war in the hands of God. He added that he hoped England would not interfere in the matter any more, but would leave him to face the Italians alone. The discussion then ended. His Majesty’s manner had been courteous and dignified throughout, and in strong contrast to the excited and aggressive tone adopted by Ras Alula at Asmara.

“The next day I was invited to another interview with the King, and had strong hopes of being able to persuade His Majesty to accept at least some of the Italian conditions, as I had discovered that Ras Alula was by no means in high favour at Court at the present moment ; but just as I was starting to go to the King I received a visit from his interpreter, who came with a message from His Majesty to the effect that he would not see me again ; that I had said I came from the Queen to try to make peace, but that he had just received a letter from Ras Alula, saying that the Italians had taken advantage of this opportunity and were advancing in force, being already beyond Sahati. The King wished to have some explanation of this. The interpreter added that His Majesty was very angry, and

evidently thought this was a preconcerted action between England and Italy. I could not tell then, and, indeed, did not know till long after I had left the King's camp, that this news was utterly false, so I merely hastened to remind the King that I had told both His Majesty and Ras Alula that my mission was perfectly independent of the Italians; that I was sent by the Queen alone, and that the actions of neither Italy on the one hand, or of his Majesty on the other, were in any way restricted by my presence in Abyssinia, but that if His Majesty would consent to the conditions which I submitted to him yesterday, I would pledge the word of England that the Italians would at present go no further than the limits therein laid down. I was, however, told, in reply, that the Italians had taken aggressive action, and that it was too late now to talk of peace.

"The result of this was that, instead of being allowed to take leave of His Majesty the following day, as I had been promised, I was, on one pretext or another, detained in the King's camp for nine more days, during the course of which I was informed that the question of whether I was to be allowed to go back at all or not was under discussion by the King and his chief men, and had not yet been decided.

"Finally, however, I was summoned to the King's presence on the 16th December, and received from His Majesty two letters for Her Majesty the Queen, and a verbal message recapitulating the decision which, as reported above, he had already communicated to me in conversation. I then took leave of His Majesty, reiterating the assurances of the continued friendship of England, and adding that, although it would be with deep regret that the Queen would hear of his rejection of any terms of peace, yet I was sure that if ever His Majesty should wish for the advice or good offices of Her Majesty's Government, he would always find that England would be ready to prove herself the best friend to Abyssinia. The Negroos thanked me, and I retired, leaving his camp near Chelicot the same day, and arriving at Asmara on the 23rd. Here I was again detained for a day by Ras Alula, but was allowed to go next day; and by travelling all night I was able to reach the Italian positions at Monkullu at daybreak on the 25th December.

"I have already mentioned that one reason for the refusal of King Johannis to listen to any terms of peace may be found in the false intelligence sent to him by Ras Alula, but I have not yet referred to two other circumstances which rendered my task almost hopeless from the outset. One of these is, that the Abyssinians

have as yet had no practical experience of the power of Italy. Throughout the country the affair of Dogali and the subsequent withdrawal of the Italian garrisons from Sahati and Wia, are looked upon as triumphs of Abyssinian over Italian arms; the Abyssinians, it must also be recollected, are inordinately proud of their courage and skill in warfare, and gain additional confidence from their immense superiority in point of numbers; and, since their acquisition, in virtue of Admiral Hewett's Treaty, of many thousands of Remington rifles and an enormous supply of ammunition, consider themselves almost invincible, and will continue to do so until they have had a lesson to the contrary. The only effect produced on the minds of the Negoos and of his advisers by the letter of warning sent by the English Government in last September was a feeling of irritation against England as well as against Italy, and a wish to show that their country was less feeble than it appeared to be considered.

“The second and most important consideration is, that when I arrived in Abyssinia the whole country was already under arms; very large armies were advancing from every direction towards the north-eastern frontier; the whole atmosphere in the King's Court, and in the camp of every Chieftain in Abyssinia, was one of warlike preparation; and His Majesty the Negoos, autocratic and greatly respected as he is, would not only have found the greatest difficulty in persuading the different leaders—some of them semi-independent—to submit quietly to his acceptance of the Italian terms of peace, but, even had he succeeded in doing so, he would have found himself face to face with the far more serious question of what was to be done with all the vast masses of armed men which, at his instigation, are now moving through his country. The great probability is that, if the present common object, *i. e.*, war with the Italians, were to be taken away, these undisciplined and half-savage armies, some of them from the country of the Gallas, from Shoa, and from the extreme outskirts of Abyssinian dependencies, would refuse to return empty-handed to their own countries, and Abyssinia would soon be torn by a series of internecine struggles between the different Chiefs and Kings, the result of which it would be impossible to foresee, but which would constitute a most serious danger to the dynasty of King Johannis himself.

“For these reasons I venture to submit my conviction that at the time when I was sent into Abyssinia no power short of actual compulsion could have induced the King to accept the terms dictated by Italy; that what might have been possible in August or

September last was impossible in December, when the whole of the immense available forces of the country were already under arms; and that there now remains no hope of a satisfactory adjustment of the difficulties between Italy and Abyssinia until the question of the relative supremacy of these two nations has been decided by an appeal to the fortune of war."

*Document communicated by Mr. Portal to the
King of Abyssinia.*

"Her Majesty Queen Victoria, whilst deeply regretting the massacre of 450 Italians committed by Ras Alula in January last, is very sorry to see that her friend, His Majesty King John, is in a state of war with the King of Italy.

"Being most anxious to avert, if possible, from Abyssinia, the calamity of such a war, she has asked the Government of Italy what are the conditions on which they will live in peace and friendship with Abyssinia, and cease their preparations for a great war.

"The King of Italy has replied that he is most willing and anxious to be at peace, and to have friendship and commerce with Abyssinia, and he has promised that all preparations for war will be at once stopped, and that no hostile action will be committed by Italy if His Majesty King John will agree to the following conditions:—

1. "That the Protectorate of Italy be recognized over the Assaorta and the Habab tribes of Arabs.

2. "That Sahati and Wia remain Italian territory, together with a zone beyond them of one day's march.

3. "That in order to prevent any further disputes in the future, the frontier of Abyssinia be marked out by pillars erected at regular intervals. The exact line of this frontier will be settled by mutual agreement between the Abyssinians and the Italians, in concert with England, who will watch over the interests of Abyssinia.

"Ghinda will be a frontier town belonging to Abyssinia.

4. "Senhit will be occupied by Italy.

5. "A Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Commerce will be signed between Abyssinia and Italy.

"Queen Victoria most earnestly hopes and confidently trusts that His Majesty King John will, without delay, signify to Her Ambassador his acceptance of these terms, and that His Majesty will thus restore to Abyssinia the blessings of peace, commerce, and prosperity.

“In that case the King of Italy will promise to give up all thoughts of any encroachment on Abyssinian territory, and will do his utmost to encourage all trade and friendship with this country ; and, at the same time, the Queen and the Government of England will undertake to use all their influence to ensure the faithful keeping of the Treaty, and will in every way endeavour to promote the welfare and prosperity of the dominions of His Majesty the Negoosa Negust.”

(Signed) G. H. PORTAL.

Ashangi, December 8th, 1887.

In the course of the weary days of inaction and suspense, during which I was forced to remain in the King's camp, *i.e.*, till the 16th December, I had sent several messages and one letter to the King, urging that I should be allowed to proceed on my journey, as the Queen would be very anxious to hear what answer Her friend King Johannis sent to Her Majesty's letter and message, but I was always told in a civil but very firm manner that my departure was impossible for the moment. As a matter of fact I knew that our fate was the subject of a great discussion by all the chiefs of the Empire at present with the King, and that the large majority of these chiefs were in favour of following Ras Alula's advice, and “treating us like enemies.” It is to the King himself, in opposition to his councillors, that is due the whole credit of having allowed the English Mission to return in safety.

On the receipt of the letter from Ras Alula, mentioned in the official report, the King had broken up his camp at Ashangi, and had continued his march northwards at the rate of about ten to fifteen miles every day ; we were forced to follow in his train, camping every evening near the

head quarters of our host or "Balderabba" Dejat Tesemma. A marvellous thing it was to see the endless mass of struggling humanity, soldiers, women, slaves, horses, mules, donkeys, and cattle, crowding along the narrow rocky paths ; the soldiers well-fed and swaggering, the slaves half-starved and miserable, the women tired with their heavy loads, but laughing and happy, but of the unfortunate mules, donkeys, and other beasts of burden, about eighty or ninety per cent. were suffering from the most ghastly and revolting sore backs and other maladies, caused chiefly by the cruel Abyssinian habit of tying on the load without a saddle, and of passing a thin cord or strip of hide round and round the unfortunate animal's back and belly, and drawing this cord as tight as their muscular arms could get it. The result of this system of "tight-lacing" was that in many instances the whole shape of the beast's stomach had been altered, causing horrible disease and ultimately death. I tried on one occasion to explain to an enormous Abyssinian who was urging on a very diminutive donkey with fiendish yells and resounding blows, that his cruel way of tying on the load was very false economy, as it incapacitated the beast from work, and would ultimately kill it long before its natural time. He answered, with a grin, that this method "had been the custom of his fathers, and, therefore, it was good enough for him." It was useless to try to argue with a staunch Conservative like this, so I gave up in despair any attempts to ameliorate the fate of mules and donkeys in Abyssinia.

On the whole, though there were some exceptions,

the struggling crowds on the march were remarkably good tempered and light-hearted ; we, of course, came in for a good deal of personal comment and "chaff," but laughter was with them always near the surface, and a few opportune presents of cartridges or bars of salt gained us many a helping hand in the crowd, where a little ill-will might easily have forced some of our mules over a precipice.

Nothing particular need be said of the days on which we travelled in the train of the King ; we camped one day at Falak, then crossed the Debar Pass, and were nearly frozen the next night, there being 10° Fahrenheit of frost. At Debar the only vegetation consisted of giant thistles, many of them as much as fifteen to twenty feet in height, with stems almost like timber trees. From Debar we marched to a most picturesque camp at Beit Mariam, where the King halted for two days ; then for two more days we marched across the Aibutto plain, the King never travelling for more than three or four hours a day, till on the 15th we passed close to Antalo and halted at Afgol. In the course of these days I had made several attempts to induce the King to allow me to leave his camp and to commence my homeward journey with his answer to the Queen, but without effect ; the only incident of any interest during this time being, that I was shot at one morning by some casual Abyssinian while I was peacefully sitting on a rock surveying the scene. However, as the bullet only smashed itself against the rock several feet to my left the incident had no particular importance.

At Afgol, on the 16th, I had the farewell interview

with the King, which I have already narrated, I was then lead from his presence to a smaller hut close by, where I was made to take off my uniform coat and to put on a pink silk-embroidered shirt, reaching to my knees ; over this was draped a "shamma" of fine gauzy cotton, with a broad band of embroidery round the edges, and then over my shoulders was placed a fine lion's mane as a sort of tippet, the front part being decorated with gold filigree work, to which the fore-legs were fastened, and hung down in front, while the hind-legs dangled down my back. A long sword, in a velvet and gold scabbard, was then tightly buckled to my *right* hip, a shield covered with silver and gold *plaques* was hung on my left arm, and a long spear placed in that hand, finally a gold ornament, in the shape of a double triangle, was hung round my neck, and thus attired I entered the presence of the King for the last time. Thanking him for his kind reception of me, and for these presents, I took leave of him and left his tent, finding at the door a new mule with a beautiful Abyssinian saddle, covered with red cloth and embroidery, on which I was expected to mount. This was not easy for me ; to begin with, the sword being tightly buckled to my right hip, I was forced to mount in Abyssinian fashion from the off-side. Then my draperies considerably hindered any freedom of knee-action on my part, and the saddle before me was small, with a cantle and pommel nearly a foot high ; but the worst of all was the fact that the stirrups were made to receive only the big toe of a bare foot, how then was I to get up with my uniform trousers and Wellington boots? However, by

dint of great activity even this difficult feat was at length accomplished, and I rode off, the centre of an admiring crowd, back to our own camp, where my arrival in this guise was the signal for much joy and laughing, as it meant that at last we were really off, and homeward bound.

In half-an-hour everything was packed, mules were loaded, I was again in more comfortable garments, much backsheesh was given, and cheerfully we turned our steps to the North.

THE RETURN JOURNEY.

In saying good-bye to me the King had expressed his hope that I would sleep that night at Mekelle, where he has recently built himself a new palace, of which he is very proud, and which is the only two-storeyed building, and, indeed, the only erection showing any attempt of architecture or permanency of construction in Abyssinia. Partly to please His Majesty, and partly because I was also anxious to see this far-famed palace, I had promised compliance with his wishes, and our first day's homeward march, past the village of Chelicot, was therefore a short one. At about 2.30 p.m. we surmounted a ridge of hills from which we looked northward over a wide, partially-cultivated plain, dotted here and there with villages, in the centre of which by far the most conspicuous object was the new palace, built of yellow or reddish stone in a kind of spurious Gothic style, with a quantity of turrets and battlements which looked

curiously out of place in the centre of Abyssinia. The building of this palace was the work of an Italian named Naretti, who personally superintended the laying of every stone, and who, with his own hands, cut out and fitted nearly all the joints and the wood work. It is almost needless to say that there is no glass in the windows, nor indeed is any required in that excellent climate. Although there is an upper storey, and although the building is fitted with various cupboards and other European inventions, the use of these luxuries is not appreciated nor understood by King John, who lives in his usual barbaric state in two large rooms on the ground floor.

As soon as we had seen our animals unloaded and turned out to graze, Beech and I walked up to the palace, but on arriving at the central gate we were disagreeably surprised at being met by a pair of truculent-looking Abyssinian soldiers, who shut the door in our faces, and utterly refused to let us enter even the outer courtyard, saying that such were the orders of the Chiefman of Mekelle. I then sent a polite message to this Chief, begging for permission to see the palace, and asking at the same time for provisions, forage, and a guide; this message was entrusted to Bruru Worke the interpreter, who was to leave us and return to the King the following morning, and I have no doubt that it was owing to the malicious or possibly only the careless way in which he translated the message that I shortly afterwards received an answer to the effect that the guide was not ready and that there were no provisions that could be spared for us. The latter item was a matter of

indifference to us, for we soon bought some milk and bread of the villagers, while as regards *pièces de resistance* we were more than amply provided, as, during our enforced stay in the King's camp, His Majesty had made me a present of a cow every day; our appetites, hearty as they were, had been quite unequal to the task of keeping pace with the supplies, and the result was, that I had now a small herd of eight nice little black heifers. One of these I ordered to be killed on the spot, and then succeeded in exchanging the remaining seven for a pretty good mule.

The non-arrival of the guide was a more serious consideration. Before leaving King John's camp, our "Balderabba," Dejat Tesemma, had promised me that at Mekelle a good guide should be provided for us, who would accompany us as far as Asmara, where he would hand us over to the tender mercies of our old friend Ras Alula. This prospect no doubt had its drawbacks, but even such a guide would be far better than no guide at all, and it was now evident that unless we consented to wait at Mekelle indefinitely we should have to continue our journey without one, and to trust to the guidance of such peasants as we might be able to hire in the different districts. There was no help for it, and at daybreak next morning, after making another fruitless attempt to get an officially-accredited guide from the chief man of Mekelle, we resumed our northward march without one.

I did not anticipate much difficulty in finding the way, as this part of the road had been traversed and well described by Mr. Harrison Smith in 1884, and at about eleven o'clock we struck into the still clearly defined road

which had been followed by Lord Napier's expedition in 1868. At noon we crossed a clear stream, and halted for an hour at Agulla, the residence of Dejat Tella, the ruler of the province through which our road lay for the next twenty or thirty miles. I had, however, no time to spare to go a mile out of my way to visit this chief, and after forty-five minutes rest we resumed our journey, both men and animals stepping out briskly, till four hours later we crossed the Dongola River, close to the village of Miriam Woggarou, where we saw a curious old church cut out of the living rock, which is reputed in the district to have been made by God Himself. We hurried on for two hours more without halting, and at length, after a very long day's march, were thankful to camp under a huge "Wurke" tree close to the village of Belessa, having put about thirty-two miles between ourselves and the King's Head Quarters, which were to move to Mekelle that day.

My men were all in the highest spirits and the best of health, the comparative rest of twelve days in the King's camp had enabled the mules to shake off the effects of the outward march; the loads were now very light and easily packed, no animal having to carry more than sixty or seventy pounds; in fact everything seemed to point to the probability of our being able to make an exceptionally rapid and easy march back to the Coast so long as we were allowed to pass unmolested by Ras Alula. Little did any of us that night foresee the complete change in our prospects which was to take place before the sun rose next morning.

Late that night one of the Arabs came and whispered to me that we were being quietly surrounded by a large

force of Abyssinians. Beech and I accordingly got up to reconnoitre, and sure enough we soon convinced ourselves that such was the case, as we could see watch fires being lighted at irregular intervals at a distance of about 200 yards on every side of us, by the glare of which the dark forms of armed Abyssinians passing to and fro were clearly visible.

Soon after three o'clock I roused the camp and gave orders for everything to be quickly and silently packed on the mules, while a large fire was kindled for the sake of light, the moon having already set. At four o'clock all was ready, Beech, Hutchisson, and I mounted our mules, and I rode a few steps forward while giving the order to march. The words were scarcely out of my mouth when about a dozen Abyssinian soldiers, armed with rifles, suddenly and silently emerged from the outer darkness into the ring of firelight, and, pushing some of my men violently aside, placed themselves near the head of the caravan declaring that we were not to advance another step.

Calling up the interpreter, young Ghirghis, I protested strongly through him against this action, explaining that we were coming straight from their King, who had received us as friends, that I was carrying his letters back to the Queen of England, and that I could not, therefore, submit to be stopped by any local chief or independent bands of soldiery. While this conversation was taking place the first grey streak of dawn was beginning to make the movements of the soldiers more clear to us, and we could see that they were momentarily increasing in numbers. The fire was going

out, and we were still collected in the shadow of the gigantic tree under which we passed the night, the Abyssinians being mostly in the clear space just beyond the spreading branches, so that with the increasing light we were able to watch their movements, and to observe that their numbers had now increased to about sixty or seventy armed men.

For a few moments the effect of my little speech was not very clear, the soldiers all fell back a few yards, and I thought that we were to be allowed to proceed in peace. Again, therefore, I rode some paces forward, when I was stopped by a sudden shout from my own men behind me. I halted, and it was then very evident that our enemies were bent on mischief; but even at that moment the wild and dramatic beauty of the scene impressed itself deeply on the memory of Beech and myself. Under the huge black tree, beside the dying but still glowing remains of the fire, were huddled together my ten Arabs and fourteen loaded mules, while Beech, Hutchisson, and I, sat quietly on our respective animals. At about seven or eight yards distance on our right flank was collected a mass of Abyssinian soldiery in their picturesque red and white robes, every man with the right shoulder bare, and every man with his rifle grasped in both hands and ready for action; the few Abyssinians who had remained on the other side of the big tree were running round with all speed to join their comrades, and to be out of the line of their bullets, should they fire a volley; while on my left, at a distance of about three or four yards, an extremely handsome Abyssinian had thrown himself on the ground, had

loaded his rifle, cocked it, and was taking a calm and deliberate aim at myself. A word of command was given, and the whole band of Abyssinians loaded their rifles, and prepared to sweep our little unarmed party off the face of the earth. There did not appear to be the smallest chance of escape for any of us, and I think we had all made up our minds that the end had come. To attempt any resistance was absolutely useless, and would only have hastened the end. There was but one chance left, and that was a very poor one. I told the interpreter to shout as quickly and as loudly as he could for the chief of the Abyssinian party to come and talk to me. To my relief and surprise, after some hesitation, a man slowly came forward from out of the mass of Abyssinians ; as he approached us, most of his men put up their rifles and covered our party, while my friend lying down close to me was still taking a careful aim at some part of my body. My interpreter told me afterwards that he heard them discussing among themselves which of them was to shoot each member of our party. When the chief got close to me I spoke to him in as loud and as indignant a tone as I could assume, telling the interpreter to do the same in translating my words. I then asked him how he dared to stop us, warning him that we were his King's friends, and that if a hair of the head of any of my men were touched, the King would inflict severe punishment on him and all his party. I continued to lecture and to swagger in this strain for a little time, and then said I was going to write at once to the King himself, and I defied him to have the audacity to stop my messenger. He appeared to be

somewhat impressed by the unexpected tone adopted by us, and said that I might send a letter to the King. With the assistance of young Ghirghis, the interpreter (who was behaving remarkably well under these trying circumstances), I then wrote a hasty letter to King John, briefly describing the situation, and expressing my surprise that such things should have happened to me after my friendly visit to His Majesty ; at the same time begging that a good guide should at once be sent to me, and that the soldiers now surrounding us should have orders to let us proceed on our journey.

This letter I gave to an Abyssinian youth, who had been for about ten days in my service, promising him a large reward if he succeeded in getting to the King, a distance of about thirty-two miles, and in bringing me an answer. Then followed many hours of anxious waiting. We were close prisoners, being still surrounded by soldiers on every side, and it soon became evident that they were beginning to regret their leniency or weakness in not finishing us off in the early morning, for soldiers continued to prowl about in an insolent and swaggering manner, laughing at, insulting, and even hustling and striking the Arabs, evidently in the hope that some hasty act of retaliation on their part would bring on a row, and furnish a good excuse for a general massacre and pillage of the caravan.

I gave the strictest orders that no one was to speak to or take any notice whatever of the soldiers, but although my men were by this time pretty well disciplined, and on ordinary occasions thoroughly obedient, we could not but fear lest their wild Arab temper should

suddenly resent some more than usually aggravating insult or blow, and that an immediate volley, followed by a rush of spearman, would be the inevitable result.

After about eleven hours of anxious and uncomfortable waiting, still surrounded on every side by Abyssinian pickets, my messenger at length re-appeared. At first he vowed that he had been to the King, and that His Majesty had said we might now proceed on our journey, but he was evidently lying, and after a little pressure he confessed that he had been taken only to Dejat Tella, the chief of the district near to whose residence we had passed on the previous day.

This chief had openly told him that it was by his orders that we had been stopped and made prisoners, but that we might now proceed. I also ascertained that several messages had passed between him and the soldiers guarding us, who now, we observed, were a good deal diminished in numbers, and some of whom seemed to be trying to make friends with us. It appeared to both Beech and myself that the chief and his soldiers were becoming a little anxious lest they had got themselves into a scrape by having stopped us in this way, and that they would now rather like to withdraw quietly and let us continue our journey unmolested. It was, however, evident that not only would it entail a great loss of dignity on my part, were I to abstain from bringing these proceedings to the notice of the highest authority in the land, but that I should thereby incur the risk of a repetition of this sort of thing in every district through which we had to pass. I determined, therefore, to take the decided step of sending Beech himself to the

King with my letter, which the Abyssinian youth had brought back with him.

In a few minutes the two strongest and swiftest mules are saddled and bridled, the best of our Arabs, a man named Mahomed Gamul, who spoke Amharic as well as Arabic, has received his orders to accompany Beech ; the letter to the King is enclosed in an envelope addressed to Dejaj Tesemma, our friend and former "Balderabba," in the King's camp, and final instructions are given to Beech that at all hazards he was to get to the Head Quarters of the King himself, and to insist on a proper guide being sent to me. One hearty grasp of the hand, a mutual wish for "good luck," and they canter off on the path back to Mekelle, while Hutchisson and I turn back to resume our anxious task of watching and waiting. I had arranged with Beech that if no objection was made to our marching next morning, I would proceed with the caravan to Adegrat, a town about thirty-six or thirty-eight miles further north, and there wait for him.

All that night Hutchisson and I sat up, rifle in hand, and kept watch alternately ; I also kept one of the men constantly on guard, as I feared that as our enemies were now beginning to feel that they had got themselves into a scrape, they might think that the simplest way out of it would be quietly to massacre the whole party and then to say that we had attacked them first. However, the night passed quietly, and a little before daybreak a cautious reconnoissance showed us that the Abyssinian soldiers had disappeared, and that we were free. Hastily we began to load the mules at 4.50 a.m., and had soon

turned our backs on the great tree, under whose dense shadow I had spent thirty-six of the most anxious hours I had ever known.

At 9.30 a.m. we passed the pools of Adarbaghi where I engaged a peasant as a guide to Adegrat. At eleven o'clock we met the chief man of Adegrat himself, who was travelling southward in state to meet the King. After hearing a rapid explanation of our business and our recent experiences, this gentleman, Shom Sohah by name, showed us every civility, gave us one of his soldiers to guide us to Adegrat, and sent back a messenger ordering his deputy to receive us well. At mid-day we halted for forty minutes at the pools of Endajesus, whence there was a most magnificent view of the mountains of Jemben to the South-West, and of our old acquaintance Mount Semayata, near Adowa, some fifty miles to the North-West. All through that afternoon we sped along at an average rate of over four miles an hour, the men often running and the mules trotting for half a mile at a time; nor did my men want any encouragement or inciting to increased speed. It was evident from the way in which they abused any of their number who showed signs of fatigue, that they were just as anxious to get out of the country as we could be. At length, after a march of eleven hours we reached Adegrat at about 5 p.m., footsore, weary, and anxious about Beech.

Early next morning I wandered off with a pair of Messrs. Callaghan's strongest field glasses, and scrambled to the top of a high conical hill, from whence I could command a view of the path from Mekelle for many

miles. Eagerly throughout the morning I scanned the horizon and swept the country for signs of Beech and Mohamed Gamul, but it was not till three o'clock in the afternoon that my anxiety, now become intense, was relieved by their appearance, on foot, leading their completely exhausted mules, and accompanied by an Abyssinian soldier.

Heartily and thankfully as they were welcomed by the whole party, time was too precious for any delay, and as soon as the animals could be caught and loaded, we were again on the march at 3.45 p.m., intending to rest that night at Fogada, some fourteen miles to the North-West. On the road I heard Beech's report of his adventures since we had parted two days before at Belessa, and I may here say that to his determined perseverance in carrying out his orders, added to the exercise on his part of the greatest tact and forethought, is due the preservation of his life and that of his Arab companion, and possibly, also the safety of the whole party. The narrative of his adventures is best given by the insertion of the report on the subject which he subsequently addressed to me, and which runs as follows:

Veterinary Surgeon J. R. Beech to Mr. Portal.

Cairo, January 8th, 1888.

Sir,

"I have the honour to report for your information that I left Belessa at 5.45 p.m. on Sunday, the 18th instant, in accordance with your orders, to carry a letter and inclosure to Dejj Tesemma at Mekelle.

"I was accompanied by a mule driver of the Mission, named Mohamed Gamul, who interpreted for me from the Arabic.

"After crossing the plain south of Mariam Wogiero we met two Abyssinian soldiers who stopped us and assured me that news had

reached the King of your Mission having been stopped at Belessa, that he was very angry, and that they had been sent by Dejj Tesemma (whose men they professed to be) with a letter to you and instructions to take the Mission safely to Asmara. They showed me a letter which I advised them to deliver to you at Belessa, as we were going to Mekelle. They then tried to lead my mule back, saying that it was useless to proceed further, as we should never be allowed to pass Agola, also inquiring persistently if I had a letter for the King. This confirmed my suspicions as to their motive, and, disengaging the mule, I rode on as fast as possible, so as to pass Agola before being overtaken. However, being mounted on mules, this was not possible, and we were soon rejoined by one man, the other keeping on his road to Belessa. On nearing Agola, the soldier who was following closed up to us and entered into conversation, endeavouring to convince me that Dejj Tesemma was at the village, that Dejj Tella was his brother, and therefore a brother of Ras Alula. To his protestations no attention was paid, and, finding himself unable to induce me to enter the village, he threw out hints of getting assistance to force us there, at the same time calling loudly. I therefore affected to believe his tale (knowing resistance to be useless after the experience of the morning) and was taken to Dejj Tella, who asked me who had brought me from Belessa. I answered that I had come alone, when he said, 'people cannot travel here without a guide, without risk of imprisonment,' and generally assumed a domineering manner and mode of expressing himself, acknowledging that we had been stopped by his orders, but without excusing himself or his action. I then informed him that you were well aware that his conduct had been unlawful, and that the King would be very angry when he heard that his men threatened the Queen's messenger with loaded rifles, advising him at the same time not to inculcate himself further by detaining me. His manner then changed, and he resorted to persuasion, politely assuring me that his sole motive was to save me fatigue, and that he would send two horsemen to Mekelle with the message, as the road was unsafe at night. To this and like propositions I always replied that my orders were to see Dejj Tesemma personally, and regretted not being able to avail myself of his kindness. After further conversation, he said, 'I am sorry that I cannot let you go,' but on my declaring that I would not return without delivering my message, but would wait there until the King came himself, he agreed to our proceeding in the morning.

"I then decided to wait until after midnight, as then the rest of

the journey to Mekelle could be accomplished by daybreak, and conversation on general subjects was resumed, he continually inquiring if I had a letter for the King, and I observed that some of his people were searching my wallets, but fortunately I had removed the letter, which was on my person. After this I was taken to a hut, the habitation of an officer, to sleep, but as it was full of men, women, and children, besides some mules and donkeys, I determined to sit up, the better to care for the letter.

"About midnight we made the first attempt to leave, unsuccessfully, but about 3 a.m. succeeded in saddling our mules and reaching the track; here we were stopped and taken back to Tella, who, after some arguing, let me go, and gave me a guide to Mekelle. With this man we reached Mekelle at 8 a.m., but then found that he had been instructed to conduct us to one of Tella's officers and his representative at Court. To this I demurred, and declared my intention of going direct to Dejj Tesemma, and proceeded to the Palace, as at that hour he is usually in attendance upon the King. On finding himself unable to prevent this, our guide ran quickly up to the outer court of the Palace, on entering which I was quickly surrounded by many people (probably adherents of Dejj Tella), who prevented my going further, and tried to obtain possession of your letter, offering to deliver it themselves. They pushed me away from the main entrance to the King's room, but at 11.30 a.m. I perceived Dejj Tesemma in court dress coming out from the King's presence, and, pushing through the crowd, delivered to him the letter. He seemed surprised to see me, and angry at the contents of the letter. The inclosure, a letter to the King, he took to His Majesty at once. On his return he called to Tella's soldier, and in a loud voice gave him a message from the King to his master, ordering him to supply us with a mounted guide to Asmara, and conveying threats of punishment should anything befall you, and censure for his action in stopping you.

"On saying farewell to Dejj Tesemma, he informed me that he had just taken leave of the King, and was leaving for Asmara to join his brother's army with all his men.

"We left Mekelle at noon, riding straight to Agola, where we had to wait for Tella's soldier, whose mule had tired on the road.

"*En route* to Agola, and about half-way between that place and Mekelle, we overtook Ras Michael, marching with the rear guard of his army, and supported on horseback, owing to his obesity, by two men. He inquired, in Arabic, my business, appeared indignant when informed, and wished the Mission "good speed." But the

reputation was of the very worst, and whose fondness for robbery, pillage, and murder was proverbial throughout the North-East of Abyssinia, and among the other Arab tribes near the coast of the Red Sea. Even the mighty Ras Alula had on many occasions been unable to resist the sudden raids of these Shohos, who had carried fire and sword into the very heart of his province. My small caravan, if discovered, would have met with but little mercy or consideration at the hands of these gentry, and it behoved us therefore to keep a careful watch that night, and to be prepared to give as warm a reception as possible to any strangers who might appear in our vicinity. Beech, Hutchisson and I, therefore again divided the night into three watches, one of the Arabs being also on guard at the same time; but such was the beauty of the night in that wild country, under the bright clear southern sky, that it was a pleasure rather than a hardship to forego a large proportion of our hard-earned rest. Beech, indeed, became so interested in astronomical study, and in the contemplation of the beauties of nature by moonlight, that he declined to go to sleep when his two and a half hours of duty were accomplished, and insisted on sitting up and sharing with me a great portion of my watch. It was one of those nights whose intense stillness and calm beauty cannot fail to make a deep impression on the mind of the watcher; the Southern Cross was glowing above the bold and rugged outline of a mountain range over which we had passed two days before; the silver light of the setting moon on one side of the heavens was almost rivalled by the calm beams of Venus as she rose

in the East ; not a breath of wind stirred the leaves on the trees, or rustled the long grass of the plain, and the silence was only broken by the screams of an occasional night-bird of prey, and the dismal howls of the skulking hyænas who were attracted by the mules to the neighbourhood of our camp. As we sat by the fire, drinking strong tea out of tin mugs, and smoking like a couple of chimneys, our loaded carbines and a few spare cartridges lying within easy reach of our right hands, Beech and I could not avoid contrasting the present stillness and peace with the stormy scenes through which we had so recently passed, and while we speculated on the fate that might yet be in store for us before we get out of Ras Alula's clutches, we agreed that we should always look back upon these hours of night-watching in Abyssinia as among the pleasantest of our lives.

At last, however, a thin grey streak becomes visible in the East, and at once we set to work to rouse the camp in earnest. Though the night has passed quietly, we are by no means anxious to prolong our stay in this suspected district ; moreover, our mules have had no water since we crossed a stream during the previous afternoon, nor do we know when the next water may be reached ; therefore, before the sun has yet appeared above the horizon, we are again *en route*, our venerable but wiry old guide leading the way at a pace that does him great credit. As the rays of the sun become stronger this worthy old gentleman shelters his bald head beneath a primitive umbrella made of plaited straw ; but besides this precaution, although he has not a single hair on his head, he has followed a popular Abyssinian custom, and

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has smeared his round cranium with a liberal allowance of mutton fat, which melts as the sun gets stronger, and running down over the back of his wrinkled neck keeps the skin soft and moist, and materially diminishes any risk of sunstroke.

It was not till 12.30 p.m. that we at last reached a pool of water, where our thirsty animals were glad to have a drink and an hour's rest ; then on we went over a long series of mountains, defiles and valleys, till we reached Gura at about 5 p.m. I declined to halt here, and sent the caravan forward under Beech's care, with instructions not to halt till they reached Woghartie, while the interpreter and I turned aside to pay a visit to a great chief who was in temporary command of Gura and the surrounding district.

Nothing could be more civil and friendly than the reception given me by this chief, Dejat Asmaha by name ; he expressed his earnest hope that a war with Italy might be averted, though he added, that if the Italians tried to advance they would all be killed. He gave me some excellent "tedge" to drink, and on my rising to take leave, expressed his regrets that my visit must be so short, and that he could not show me greater hospitality, with a sincerity and a dignity of manner that might with advantage be copied by many a London hostess. It was nine o'clock, pitch dark and raining, when I reached Woghartie, where I found Beech and the caravan in the act of arranging our camp for the night.

At daybreak next morning (the 23rd), I sent Beech and Ghirghis (the interpreter) on ahead, with instructions to push on as fast as they could to Asmara, and to

announce my approach to Ras Alula, while I followed at a more sober pace with the rest of the caravan. Two hours and a half later we arrived at Asmara, and were at once conducted to the hut in which we had spent ten such very unpleasant days on our outward journey. I then lost no time in arraying myself in all the finery, lion's skin, and robes of honour, given to me by the King, and thus attired I solemnly rode up to the foot of the huge mud pyramid on which stands the hut of the great man. My object in thus adorning myself was to show clearly, not only to the Ras himself but to all his people, that I had been received as a friend by the King, and had been treated with honour, and I fondly hoped that Ras Alula would not now dare to put any further impediments in my way. I found him sitting in judgment outside his hut, surrounded by a great crowd of people, while the plaintiff and defendant in the case which was at that moment being heard, were standing in an open space in front of the Ras, both much excited, and both talking at once at the top of their voices with much violent and threatening gesticulation. My arrival was the signal for a dead silence, while I walked up and shook hands with the great man ; my appearance in the King's robes evidently had a considerable effect among the populace, but I was greatly disappointed when, in answer to my request for a guide to take me to the frontier, the Ras answered that he could not allow me to go away that day, but that he would see me and hear the result of my mission to the King in the course of the afternoon. There was no help for it ; annoying as it was, we had to wait, and matters looked by no means brighter

when I went again at five o'clock in the afternoon to have a talk with Ras Alula. He was sitting on a raised dais in his large reception hut, surrounded by about sixty or seventy people all squatting on the ground. A chair was brought for me, and I established myself at a few paces from the dais and almost opposite the Ras. After a somewhat cold and ceremonious greeting, Ras Alula made but little secret of his surprise (and I may confidently add, his disappointment) at seeing that we had been allowed by the King to leave the country in safety. He asked me if I had repeated to the King all that I had said about the Italians when I was last at Asmara. I replied that certainly I had told the King all that and a great deal more, that I had spoken very openly with His Majesty, and had tried to impress upon him the futility and uselessness of engaging in a desperate war with a foreign people about a desolate and barren tract of land like that about Sahati. I added that the King had listened carefully and courteously to all I had said, and had given me his answer, and that all I had to do now was to take back this answer, together with a couple of letters from King John, to the Queen of England. Ras Alula then insisted on seeing the King's letters, in order to satisfy himself that the seals were genuine, and that I was not deceiving him. This was insulting on his part, but I had foreseen the probability of his making this demand, and had therefore brought the letters with me. With some protest, therefore, I handed them to the Ras, who made a careful examination of the seals and superscriptions, with the help of his writer or private secretary, for the great man himself is unable either to read or write ;

he then with some muttered remark, like the snarl of a wild beast, returned them to me. I then repeated my request for a guide to conduct me to the frontier, adding that it should now be clear to him that I must leave the country on the King's business, and as the King's friend. I presumed, therefore, that he would not further interrupt my journey. He replied, "Tell me all that the King said to you, and what are the messages you are taking?" I answered that I did not consider myself at liberty to reveal the King's business, that His Majesty would no doubt in time let him know as much as he wished, and I repeated that the King was anxious for me to take the letters to the English Queen as quickly as possible. During this time Ras Alula's manner had been growing more and more violent and excited; he no longer spoke to me, he shouted and yelled, shaking his hand at me, his eyes flashing, and his features working with excitement and rage. He then, at the top of his voice, delivered a tirade against the Italians, the English in general, and myself in particular, saying that we English pretended to be the friends of Abyssinia, while we were really her enemies, and friends of the Italians; that I had come up on false pretences and to gain time, while my friends, the Italians, were taking advantage of my mission to complete their preparations and to push their armies forward; and that I was really an enemy, and ought not to be allowed to leave the country. While all this discussion had been going on, I confess that the Ras' insulting words and aggravating manner had succeeded in making me also very angry, and when this last speech was translated to me, I determined not to be outdone,

and so I also shouted back at him as loudly and as indignantly as I could, reminding him that the business I had come about was between my Queen and his King, that I could not stop to discuss the question with anyone but the King, that I was the King's friend, and had not only his Majesty's permission to leave the country, but had been particularly requested to take the letters to England as quickly as possible. "You," I shouted, "no doubt have the power to stop me by force, but if you do not let me go at once, I tell you that I will not go at all, but will wait here until the King himself arrives, and let him be judge between us." On this one or two elderly chiefs sitting near the Ras spoke a few words to him in a low tone, whereupon he replied in a somewhat quieter manner: "To-night you shall stay at Asmara, to-morrow morning you may go. I will give you a guide." With this reply I was satisfied, and abruptly rose to conclude the interview.

An hour or so later one or two chiefs who had been present at this interview came to see me, and told me that Ras Alula had been drunk, that this was now not an unfrequent occurrence with him, but that when he was in that state he was very dangerous.

This interview was of course the subject of a good deal of gossip that night in Asmara, and some account of it evidently reached the ears of my men, for I was sorry to see the air of depression, almost of despair, which soon crept over them. They evidently thought that their chances of getting back to their families at Massowah were most problematical.

Next morning (the 24th), at eight o'clock, I received

a message to say that the Ras was ready for me. On arrival I found him much quieter in manner than on the previous evening. After a short and comparatively friendly conversation we shook hands, and I left him, finding the promised guide ready to start, and a present of a sheep awaiting me at my hut.

At ten o'clock we left Asmara, after a liberal distribution of backsheesh to all who had shown us any friendly disposition, and till three o'clock that afternoon we travelled without halting along the mountainous but familiar road to Ginda, which it will be remembered, is the most advanced position held by the Abyssinians in force. We were glad to learn that the principal chief at Ginda was an old acquaintance of ours, a nephew of Ras Alula, by name, Basha Desta, who had shown us more good will and civility on our outward march than we had experienced at the hands of any other Abyssinian. I therefore turned a little aside from the direct path on approaching this place, and rode up a precipitous hill to a collection of huts which, I learnt, constituted the headquarters of this chief. Desta received me with effusive cordiality, insisted on my sitting down beside him on a raised dais at one end of his hut, while some rather pretty female slaves prepared a large bowl of bread and milk, liberally besprinkled with red pepper, for my refreshment. It would have been very bad manners on my part to have refused to eat with him, and moreover the twenty-five mile ride from Asmara had made me ready to cope with anything in the shape of food and drink ; I therefore thankfully grasped the wooden bowl, and proceeded to ladle its contents into my mouth with my fingers as best

I could, while, at a signal from the chief, two slaves held up a large cotton robe before me so as to form a curtain, hiding me from the vulgar gaze of the other occupants of the hut until my hunger was satisfied. I then returned the bowl half-emptied to one of the slaves, who bowed, kissed the edge of my coat, and then set herself to work to finish off the contents, evidently much to her own satisfaction. In the course of conversation Basha Desta informed me that Ginda was at that moment occupied by three thousand soldiers, all armed with Remington rifles, one thousand of whom were his own personal followers, but that he had little authority over the remainder. He warned me at the same time that I might still have some difficulty in getting out of the country, as the other chiefs knew that Ras Alula was very hostile to the English mission, and they might think they would be pleasing him by opposing our further progress. This increased my anxiety to rejoin my people without further delay, and I therefore lost no further time in taking leave of Basha Desta, and in scrambling down a rocky path to a grassy meadow below, where I found Beech and the caravan waiting for me, but somewhat uneasy at being surrounded by about one hundred armed Abyssinian soldiers, whose attitude announced that they were not disposed to let us proceed on our journey without some difficulty.

I first asked these soldiers what they wanted, and getting no answer, determined to put them to the test at once, and therefore ordered my men to march, Beech and I riding as usual at the head. We had not gone ten yards when it became evident that our troubles were by

no means over yet ; the Abyssinians posted themselves in a compact mass before us, and completely barred our further progress, while one of them who seemed to be a man of some consequence, said that we were not to go on, and that if we attempted to do so he was ordered to use force to stop us. I replied that I had seen Basha Desta, and that I had his permission to proceed on our journey. At this the soldiers laughed, and said that they had nothing to do with Basha Desta, that they belonged to another chief who had an equally strong and well-armed following at Ginda, and who was a friend of Ras Alula. As it was evidently waste of time to argue with these soldiers, who were only obeying the orders of their chief, I told one of them to conduct me to his head quarters, which, after a short consultation with his comrades, he consented to do.

On my arrival at his hut this chief received me very badly, not rising from his seat, and pretending to ignore my presence altogether. My suspicions as to the reasons for his action were confirmed by seeing at his right hand a man whom I had noticed in Ras Alula's hut the previous evening, and who had evidently been sent on with secret instructions to prevent us from leaving the country despite the King's orders to the contrary. Powerful and dreaded as is the name of Ras Alula, I knew that his authority, even in his own province, is inferior to that of King John, and I determined to try to carry off this matter with a high hand.

I opened the proceedings by walking up to the chief and standing in front of him, asking in a loud voice by whose authority he dared to prevent me from continuing

my journey in peace, when I not only had the King's permission to leave the country, but was even carrying His Majesty's letters. I then produced the King's letters, and showed him the seals. This appeal to the authority of King John evidently rather frightened the chief, who merely answered that he could not let me go now, but that he would send a messenger to Asmara to ask Ras Alula what should be done with me. I replied, that unless he allowed me to continue my journey at once, I would remain at Ginda, not only till Ras Alula's answer should be received, but until the arrival of the King himself, who, it was well known, was advancing with his army towards the frontier; King Johannis, I said, should be the judge between us to decide whether his letters, on matters of the highest importance, were to be stopped in this way by a chief commanding only one thousand men. This threat produced an immediate effect; whether visions of floggings, degradation or decapitation floated before his eyes, I cannot tell, but his manner softened immediately, and when my interpreter had quietly slipped a rouleau of twenty dollars into his willing hand, he not only withdrew all his objections, but said that he would give me an escort to accompany us for four hours march towards the Italian forts. This was by no means what I wanted, but I dared make no further remarks, and having left the hut as soon as possible, I rejoined my people, and once more ordered the advance.

This time we got along well for nearly a quarter of a mile, when once more we noticed soldiers rushing down the side of a hill, and planting themselves in the path before us with threatening gestures. Taking no notice

of them I continued to advance, until several of them proceeded to load their rifles and to present them at our heads, upon which I thought it was time to halt.

It was with a feeling almost of despair that I asked the cause of this fresh interruption ; my men were in the deepest despondency, and I think we all began to fear that we should never get out of this accursed country. It appeared that our new assailants were the soldiers of yet another chief, and that their object in stopping us was to claim three of my Arabs, who, they said, were Abyssinians, and should not be allowed to leave the country until they had paid a fine of three hundred dollars. This was a disgraceful and barefaced attempt at extortion, and at any other time we should have resisted this ridiculous claim to the utmost, but now we were too sick at heart at these constant interruptions and difficulties to make a very determined opposition, and after a good deal of bargaining, argument, and threat, I settled this claim by an immediate payment of ten dollars to the leader of the party opposing us.

At last we were permitted to resume our march, but were soon overtaken by an unwelcome escort of thirty men of the Ginda garrison, who informed us that they had orders to accompany us to a place about four hours further on the road to the Italian lines. Much as we should have liked to decline the honour of their company we did not dare to do so, but had to follow in their wake with a most uncomfortable feeling of wonder as to whether these men had orders to dispose of us quietly as soon as we should be well within the limits of the turbulent lawless district lying between the Italian and

Abyssinian armies, in which robbery and murder were at this time the rule rather than the exception, and which was infested by independent scouting parties of Abyssinians on the one hand, by prowling bands of the savage Arab tribes of the neighbourhood on the other, and occasionally by the Italian native irregulars from the camp at Massowah. It was a matter of complete indifference to us which of these different classes of rovers we should come across, should we unfortunately be destined to meet anyone in this district. We knew that it would be a question almost of shooting at sight, and that none of these people would have either the time nor the inclination to listen to any explanation.

Beech, Hutchisson, and I therefore rode with our rifles on our knees, loaded and ready for immediate action, while our vigilance was stimulated by noticing that when Ginda had been left a few miles behind us, the Abyssinian soldiers of the escort all looked carefully to the loading of their rifles, while they marched along in single file with more than their ordinary silence, rapidity, and watchfulness. At eight o'clock in the evening we reached the wells of Sabarguma, where I called a halt for dinner and for a rest of three hours for the sake of the mules, as I intended to march all that night.

Hardly had we unloaded the animals and turned them loose to pick a scanty meal from the coarse grass, when down came rain in torrents, extinguishing the fire which had just been lighted, and converting the native bread which was to form our dinner into a sodden mass, which could be conveyed to our mouths by a

spoon with much more facility than by our fingers. Hutchisson's noble efforts to make us some hot tea were unavailing against the pitiless storm, and our dinner that night in the pitch darkness was a comfortless one. Equally futile were any attempts to get a little rest, so we wandered about in the little plain, impatiently looking at our watches, and eventually cutting short the three hours rest promised to the mules, and readjusting the loads at half-past ten.

Another hour's silent march in the darkness, and then, to our relief, the chief of the escort said that he must now return. It was with a feeling of thankfulness that we saw these men turn round, after receiving a liberal present of dollars, and begin to retrace their steps to Ginda.

We now felt that we had at last severed all connection with Abyssinia, and that we had no longer anything to fear but a meeting with some prowling band of robbers, or with irregular scouting parties.

For the first time since the expedition had started, I now gave arms to my men, distributing among them a quantity of spears and swords, which we had bought at various times in the country. This somewhat lessened the feeling of nervousness which the night-march with empty stomachs was evidently causing to spread among them; and then, leaving Hutchisson to ride in the rear and to keep the party together, Beech and I dismounted and walked with loaded rifles at some little distance ahead of the party. Luckily the rain soon ceased, the moon came out, and the path was not difficult to see. Towards three o'clock in the morning

we recognized the hills close to Sahati, and redoubled our precautions, as it was extremely probable that we should find a party of some kind, probably enemies, encamped for the night in this place, near the only water in the district. Beech and I therefore advanced cautiously several hundred yards ahead of the caravan, peering into the rocks and bushes on every side, and eventually creeping into the open space near the water, which constitutes the only suitable camping ground, with as much care as is exercised by a successful burglar as he approaches the plate-room. Somewhat to our surprise, and greatly to our relief, we found neither Italian troops, Bashi-Bazouks, Arab robbers, nor Abyssinian scouts in this place ; it was absolutely deserted.

We were now only about 12 miles from the Italian camp, and so, not wishing to disturb the Head-quarter Staff at too early an hour, and partly also because I feared that in the darkness a zealous Italian sentry might mistake us for an Abyssinian party, I ordered another halt for two hours. Throwing ourselves on the swampy ground, we were all asleep in a few minutes, though not before Beech, with a praiseworthy wish to present a creditable appearance on arrival in the Italian camp, had had a bath in the deep but stagnant pool ; a noble example which I had not the energy nor the moral courage to follow, my only answer to his encouragement being an indistinct sound, half grunt and half snore, as I stretched myself more comfortably in the muddy swamp. A little before daybreak we were again on the march, and at ten minutes to seven on Christmas morning we rode into the Italian lines, to the open-mouthed astonish-

ment of the field-officer of the day, whom we met as he was going his rounds.

After receiving a most kind and cordial welcome from the General commanding the most advanced force, we rode on to Monkullu, where we were soon established in a comfortable hut and enjoying the eager hospitality of our dear old friend, Colonel Avogadro.

I think that both we and the men felt a little thrill of pardonable pride as we reflected that less than twenty-two hours had elapsed since we had taken leave of Ras Alula, about sixty miles off at Asmara, beyond the black forbidding range of mountains which bounded the western horizon.

A few telegrams announcing our safe return and reporting the political results of the Mission were soon despatched, and then, with a feeling almost of sadness, I summoned before me for the last time the men who had travelled with us for so many hundred miles, and who had been our companions in so many awkward and embarrassing situations.

One by one they came forward in answer to their names to receive their money and to say good-bye to Beech and myself, and I am not ashamed to confess that as one after another they spontaneously seized and kissed my hands, coat, or any part of my clothing that they could reach, I felt that I was parting with good friends, wild Arabs though they were, whose genuine emotion thus expressed was far more affecting than would be the most *empressé* greeting of European civilization. Glad as we all were to return to comfort and safety, we were honestly sorry to sever all connection

with one another. I firmly believe that those men would, without hesitation, have followed Beech and myself through any dangers or into the most distant countries, and would have given implicit obedience even in the most trying circumstances.

To test the extent of their confidence in us I said to them that, though I was going away now, it was possible that I might be back again very soon, and that I might wish to undertake another journey into the heart of Abyssinia; I would take nobody with me who did not wish to come,—would any of them, I asked, volunteer for such another journey with me? Unanimously they shouted that they would all come, while the three older ones, namely, the “Grand Old Man,” the “Chief Butcher,” and the “Chief Baker,” made another plunge and a grab at my hand and recommenced the kissing process with much energy, evidently forgiving or forgetting the fact that during the last two months Beech and I had on various occasions hurled at their dense but devoted heads every term of abuse, every expletive and every forcible expression of which we were masters, whether in English or Arabic. However, the best of friends must part, and after a final gurgle, half sob half laugh, from the G. O. M., I dismissed them to their homes, having had the satisfaction of obtaining a promise of employment for them from the Italian Military Authorities, the man who accompanied Beech on his adventurous solitary ride being of course recommended for especial favours.

For two days we remained in the Italian camp, meeting with the greatest kindness on all sides from the Italian officers, and enjoying the cordial hospitality

of General San Marzano, and of our old friend Colonel Avvogadro, till on the evening of the 27th we embarked on board the Italian ship-of-war "Rapido," which sailed that night for Suez, where we landed ourselves and the little baggage yet remaining to us, on the evening of the last day of 1887.

Thus ended the English Mission to King Johannis of Abyssinia. Into the political effect or the results achieved by that Mission, I do not propose to enter. They must be judged by the light of subsequent events. I will only point out that no collision has as yet taken place between the Abyssinian and Italian armies, and, in common fairness both to ourselves and to those who sent us, I may be allowed to place on record my conviction that had Her Majesty's Government not made this effort to bring about the establishment of cordial relations between these two countries, not only would the neighbourhood of Massowah have been the scene of active hostilities, but many hundreds of valuable lives, both European and Abyssinian, would have been wasted in a war, in which even a signal victory could bring but little practical advantage to either of the combatants. The ultimate result of such a war between a civilised and a semi-barbarous nation cannot of course be doubted, but it is to be feared that victory would have been bought at the price of much blood and terrible hardships on both sides.

The merits of the quarrel do not enter into the scope of this narrative, but it is a matter for congratulation that up to the present moment no further bloodshed has

taken place, and no one who has once seen the nature of the gorges, ravines, and mountain passes near the Abyssinian frontier, can doubt for a moment that any advance by a civilized army in the face of the hostile Abyssinian hordes, would be accomplished at the price of a fearful loss of life on both sides.

No one who has had any acquaintance with the Abyssinians can deny their desperate bravery; thieves and liars, brutal, savage, and untrustworthy they are by nature, but these evil national characteristics are to a great extent redeemed by the possession of unbounded courage, by a total disregard of death, and by a national pride which leads them to look down with genuine contempt on every human being who has not had the good fortune to be born an Abyssinian.

It may be thought that we ourselves had but little cause to love the Abyssinians as a race; but although no doubt we were at times in somewhat difficult situations, and subjected to certain inconveniences during our journey, yet we met with many little acts of genuine hospitality and kindness in the villages through which we passed, and I do not think that there was one of our party who would not be glad to have another chance of making a visit to the rich valleys and towering mountains which are inhabited by the extraordinarily handsome, active, and chivalrous race of mountaineers at present ruled over by Johannis, King of the Kings of Ethiopia.

THE END.

APPENDIX.

The following papers have already been made public:—

LETTERS TAKEN BY MR. PORTAL TO KING JOHANNIS
OF ABYSSINIA.

No. 1.—*The Marquis of Salisbury to the King of Abyssinia.*

To His Majesty the King of Kings of Ethiopia, Johannis.

BY command of the Queen my most gracious Sovereign, I have the honour to introduce to your Majesty Mr. Gerald Portal, of Her Majesty's Legation at Cairo, who has been intrusted with the duty of delivering to your Majesty the letter which the Queen has been pleased to address to you.

I doubt not that your Majesty will receive Mr. Portal favourably, that you will give entire credence to all that he shall say to you on behalf of the Queen and of Her Majesty's Government, and that your Majesty will enable him to discuss fully and frankly with your Ministers the matters alluded to in the Queen's letter.

Assuring your Majesty of my sincere friendship and esteem, and with my best wishes for your Majesty's health and happiness, I commend you to the protection of the Almighty.

Your sincere Friend,

(Signed)

SALISBURY.

(L.S. Secretary of State's seal.)

Foreign Office, London,

October 12, 1887.

No. 2.—*Her Majesty to the King of Abyssinia.*

Victoria, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland Queen, Defender of the Faith, Empress of India, &c.

To our Friend the King of Kings of Ethiopia, Johannis.

WE trust your Majesty is in good health. We are, through the mercy of God, quite well.

Two months ago we sent our greeting to your Majesty in a letter, and expressed our earnest desire for your Majesty's health and the peace and prosperity of your dominions.

Circumstances have arisen with respect to certain territories adjacent to your Majesty's dominions, and which have been under the government of His Highness the Khedive, rendering it desirable to enter into fuller communication with your Majesty.

We have therefore deemed it expedient to send to your Majesty a trusty official attached to our Legation at Cairo, Mr. Gerald Portal, who will deliver this letter.

Reposing full confidence in his discretion, we have authorized him to discuss with your Majesty's Ministers the matters aforesaid, and other matters concerning which communications have passed at various times between your Majesty and ourselves.

We commend our honoured and trusted messenger to your Majesty's protection and favour, and assure you of our constant wishes for your Majesty's health and happiness, and for the prosperity and welfare of your dominions.

And so we recommend you to the protection of the Almighty.

Given at our Court at Balmoral, this 12th day of October, 1887, and in the fifty-first year of our reign.

(Signed) VICTORIA, R. I.

(L.S. Large signet.)

(L.S.) (Countersigned) SALISBURY.

To the King of Kings of Ethiopia, Johannis.

TWO LETTERS FROM KING JOHN OF ABYSSINIA
TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN, BROUGHT BY MR. PORTAL.

No. 1.

(King's Seal.)

(Translation of Seal : King of Kings, John of Ethiopia.)

(Translation.)

IN the name of God and Jesus Christ, Whose mercy is great.

From him whom God has exalted, John, King of Sion, King of Kings of Ethiopia, to our friend, great and merciful, Queen Victoria, by the Grace of God Queen of Ireland [*sic*] and Empress of India, and Defender of the Christian Faith.

Since I wrote to you, how are you? For myself, I and all my kingdom are well by the Grace of God and by the intercession of our Mother of Sion. May God exalt all the saints. I am well. May the mercy of God endure for ever.

I have received your letter of the 12th Thikent and the 16th Hedar with reference to making peace with the Italians. To say truth, I have never done anything, and have never committed any offence against you, or against the Turks (*i.e.*, Egyptians). When the Treaty was signed between me and England and Egypt, it was laid down that no arms were to pass Massowah except by my permission, but they have not complied with the Treaty, but have passed weapons and sold them to the Shahos* and these have made great disturbances in my country. As for the complaints they (*i.e.*, the Italians) made that they had been badly treated, the fault was on their side, and they began the quarrel by stopping the Abyssinian merchants, and by occupying Sahati and Wia, and taking possession of them. Why did they stop the trade and come into my country? I wrote to them: If you have come with authority from the Queen,† show me her signature, or if not, leave the country." And they answered me: "No, we will not."

On account of that they fought with Ras Alula, and many were killed on both sides, though we had in no way injured them. How can you say that I shall hand over to them the country which Jesus Christ gave to me? That would be as a command to me unjust on your part. If your wish were to make peace between us, it should be when they are in their country and I in mine. But now on both sides the horses are bridled and the swords are drawn; my soldiers, in numbers like the sand, are ready with their spears. The Italians desire war, but the strength is in Jesus Christ. Let them do as they will, so long as I live I will not hide myself from them in a hole.

The Town of Ashangi, 24th Hedar, 1880.

No. 2.

King John of Abyssinia to Her Majesty the Queen.

(King's Seal.)

(Translation.)

IN the name of God and of Jesus Christ, Whose mercy is great.

From him whom God has exalted, John, King of Sion, King of Kings of Ethiopia, to our dear friend the great and merciful

* Hostile frontier tribes near Massowah.

† In the translation "the King."

Queen Victoria, by the Grace of God Queen of Ireland [*sic*] and Empress of India, Defender of the Christian Faith.

Since I wrote to you, how are you? I and all my people by the Grace of God are well, may His mercy endure for ever.

I have received your letters of the 12th Thikent and the 16th Hedar by the hand of your honourable servant Mr. Gerald Portal, and I have also received through him two gold-mounted swords, one good gun, and one telescope, which you have sent to me as a sign of friendship. I have received these, and I thank you very much for them. May God reward you.

Ashangi, 28th Hedar, 1880.

EXTRACT FROM A REPORT RESPECTING THE FORCES
OF ABYSSINIA.

Mr. Portal to Sir E. Baring.

Cairo, January 1st, 1888.

Sir,

IN my despatch of this day's date I mentioned that several great armies were now on their way from the interior to the north-eastern frontier of Abyssinia. I have now the honour to inclose herewith a memorandum, giving the substance of information gathered either from personal observation or from hearsay respecting the actual distribution of the forces of the Abyssinian Empire. The most striking feature about those armies with which I came into personal contact was the very large number of persons on the march. For instance, in Ras Michael's camp there cannot have been less than 50,000 or 60,000 persons, but as the army is accompanied by great numbers of slaves, cattle drivers, and other non-combatants, I have estimated his army at about 25,000 fighting men. This Ras Michael is an old man, with a great reputation as a soldier; he was originally a Mussulman, and was called Mohamed Ali, but some years ago renounced his religion in favour of Christianity, the King himself being his sponsor. It was probably this circumstance which led to his being erroneously described by Sir W. Hewett as the adopted son of the King. (Admiral Sir W. Hewett to Admiralty, June 22nd, 1884.) Ras Michael's army consists almost exclusively of Galla cavalry from the wild uncivilized tribes of the south, interspersed with a good many negroes from the Soudan. I had several opportunities of studying this force, as on

one occasion we rode through Ras Michael's camp, on another his army and camp followers marched past us at a distance of less than half-a-mile, and later still Major Beech rode through the middle of the army while on the march, when he was taking a letter from me to the King.

The only other force which I saw personally was that accompanying the Negroos himself, which I was told, consisted only of his guards, the main body of the army having gone by another route with His Majesty's son, Ras Aria Selassie. These guards, some 5,000 men, are nearly all armed with rifles, and are accompanied by a large number of slaves and non-combatants in the proportion of nearly three to one, but many of the slaves and dependents are armed with spears, shields, and swords, and might very possibly take some part in active hostilities with their masters. The men composing these armies are as a rule in the prime of life and remarkably active ; by nature they are expert mountaineers, and they are constantly in the habit of practising with their fire-arms at marks or at wild animals, but are not, I should say, particularly good marksmen. By far the larger proportion of the fire-arms are Remington rifles and carbines, but there are a good many old muskets and antiquated weapons of every kind to be seen in the various armies. Ammunition appears to be cheap and plentiful, and there exists at Adwa an establishment where old cartridge cases can be recapped and reloaded, though the Abyssinians have not yet the power of making new cartridges. Every soldier buys his own ammunition, and is therefore careful to keep the old cases. Powder is also manufactured to a great extent at Adwa, but it is not of a very high quality.

The armies on the march are supplied with provisions as far as possible by the villages in the districts through which they pass, foraging parties going many miles from the road and bringing back villagers laden with grain, grass, and flour, and driving sheep and cattle before them. It is almost needless to say that no payment is given for these supplies. Besides this, every soldier brings with him from his own village a skin full of flour, and probably some other provisions to support him through the campaign. All the soldiers I saw in the armies on the march appeared always to have plenty to eat, but the slaves, both male and female, were often more than half starved.

In spite, however, of these precautions, it is not difficult to see that the vast bodies of men now moving towards the frontier will

not be able to support themselves in that district for more than a very limited number of days. The Province of Asmara is mountainous and of an exceptionally poor soil, and the villages are already greatly impoverished by the exactions made upon them by the armies of Ras Alula and Ras Hogoos, both of which have been for several months quartered on this district.

If, therefore, the proposed concentration of the Abyssinian forces in the neighbourhood of Asmara is carried out, the King will be forced to make up his mind quickly to one of two alternatives : either a very large proportion of his forces must retire again within a few days to more fertile and more distant provinces in the interior, or else he must at once descend towards the Italian positions in the hope of finishing the campaign by one determined and general attack.

I have, etc.,

(Signed) G. H. PORTAL.

Inclosure 4 in No. 1.

MEMORANDUM.

Estimate of the Numbers and Distribution of the Abyssinian Forces at present in the Field.

FOR the sake of convenience, the Abyssinian forces in the field at the time when I left the King's camp at Chelikot, *i.e.*, the 16th December, may be divided into three classes :—

(A.) Those already quartered on the frontier and watching the Italians ;

(B.) Those advancing towards Gura and Asmara by the straight road from the south viâ Ashangi Lake and Adegrat ; in other words, the road followed by the English army under Lord Napier in 1868 ; and

(C.) Those advancing from the west and south-west viâ Semen and Adwa.

(A.) On the frontier already are :—

1. Ras Alula, the Governor of the district of Asmara. His army consists of about 16,000 men, nearly all armed with Remington rifles and carbines ; but it was explained to me that of his army about one-third are not really the Ras' own men, but are

soldiers lent to him by the King, and whom His Majesty could recall at any moment.

For the greater part of the summer and autumn the army of Ras Alula was massed at Keren, but it is now distributed among several villages throughout the district.

In this army are included (1) the garrison of Ginda, 3,000 men, all with Remington rifles, and (2) the garrisons of Ailet and a few outlying frontier villages.

At Ailet there are not more than 200 riflemen.

2. Ras Hogoos. His army is larger than Ras Alula's, and numbers probably 20,000 men, most of them with fire-arms. They are all encamped at Keren. The Ras Hogoos himself was with Ras Alula at Asmara while I was there.

(B.) Advancing viâ Ashangi and Adegrat :—

1. His Majesty the King and his guards, about 5,000 men, with a large number of partly-armed slaves, camp-followers, and women. They advance at the rate of about 10 miles a day, but do not march more than four or five days a week as a rule. These guards are all armed with Remingtons, Sniders, muskets, or fire-arms of some kind, including a certain number of Wetterly rifles taken from the Italians at Dogali.

The main body of the King's army is with Ras Aria Selassie, the King's son.

2. Ras Michael, with some 25,000 Galla cavalry, the great majority armed only with spears, swords, and shields. These men are wild and unruly, and commit many acts of barbarity and ruffianism in passing through the country. A very large number of them have a mule as well as a horse.

This army is advancing by the same road as the King, but was usually about one day's march in advance of the Negoos. On the 19th December, Ras Michael's army had arrived at Agula.

3. Ras Hailoo Mariam, Governor of the Province of Wadela. His army I did not see personally ; it was described to me as being "larger than Ras Alula's." He was expected to come into the King's camp with his army the day that I left His Majesty, *i.e.* the 16th December.

Ras Hailoo Mariam is a nephew of the Negoos.

4. Dejat Meshesha, another nephew of the King, was expected

to arrive in the King's camp with a force of about 5,000 men the day that I left it.

5. King Menelek of Shoa, with an army said to be larger than King John's own forces, is advancing rapidly northwards. King John knows well that Menelek has been on good terms with Italy, but has ordered him to come with his army, threatening to destroy him and his country should he not arrive in time. Although Menelek's army is so large, neither he himself nor his forces appear to be thought very highly of by the soldiers of Tigré or Amhara. On the 16th December Menelek was said to be already past Yeju, and close to Ashangi Lake, and marching rapidly. As to this army, however, no trustworthy evidence was obtainable.

(C.) The third and greatest column is advancing from Dobra Tabor and the districts near Lake Tsana viâ Semen and Adwa towards the frontier. This column includes :—

1. The main body of the King's army, under the command of His Majesty's son, Ras Aria Selassie. This is the largest army in Abyssinia (except that of Menelek), and may, I think, be estimated at nearly 40,000 combatants, of whom probably two-thirds have fire-arms of some kind. They had passed Semen, and were near Adwa in the middle of December.

2. Wakshem Gabru, the most powerful Chief in the Empire, Governor of the Province Begemeder (in which is Dobra Tabor, the King's usual residence). His large army is with that of the King under Ras Aria Selassie, advancing by Semen and Adwa.

I may here explain that in Abyssinia there are only two men who may bear the title of Wakshem. They are named respectively Wakshem Gabru and Wakshem Boru. These men are superior to any Ras, and when at Court always sit with the King and eat at his table, an honour not granted to any Ras or Dejat.

3. Wakshem Boru is, I believe, also advancing by the same route, but I could obtain no definite information as to the whereabouts of his army.

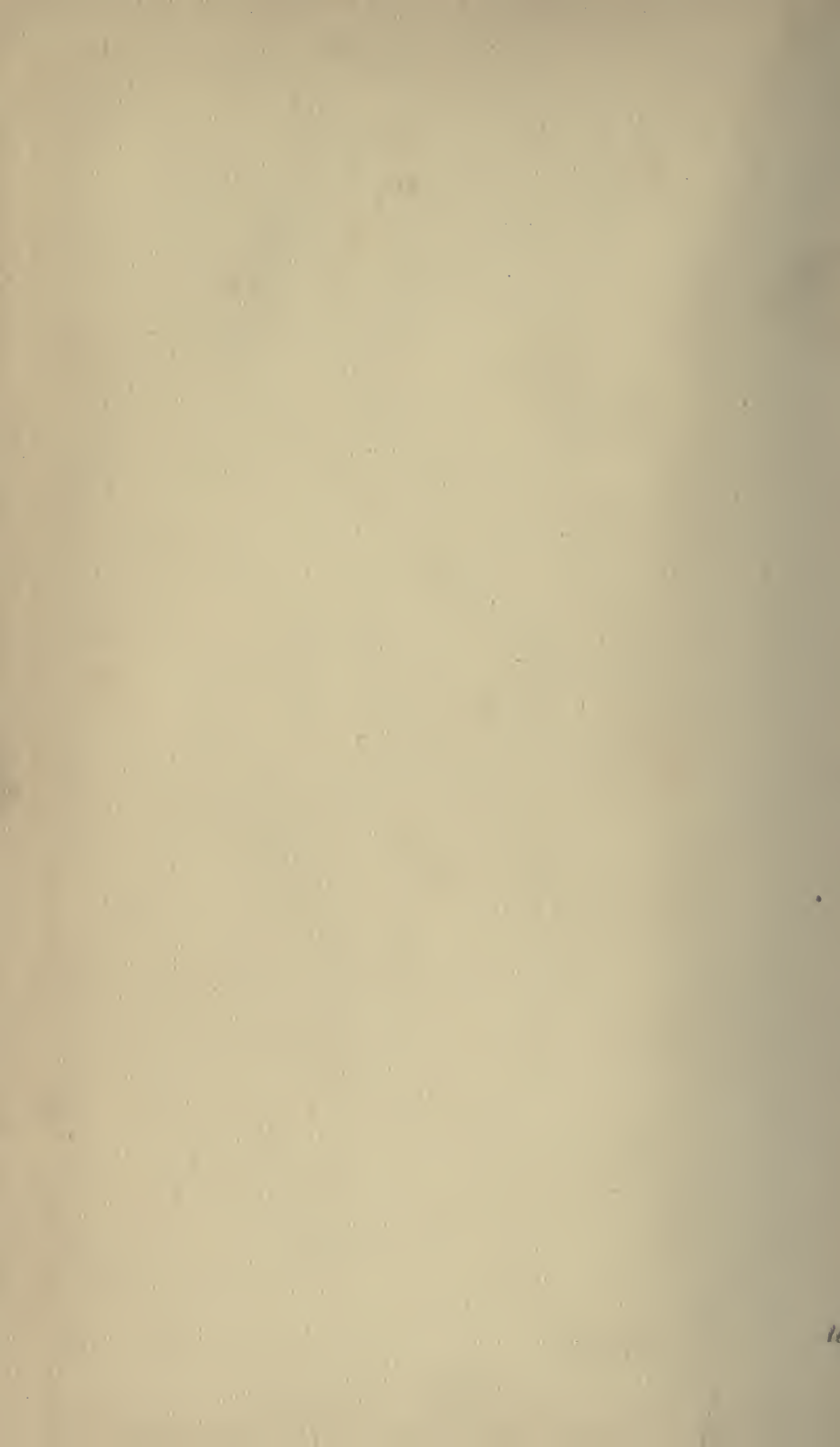
4. Dejat Tesemma, with an army said to be twice the size of that of Ras Alula, is advancing with Ras Aria Selassie by the same route.

There is one other, and an important army, on the march in Abyssinia, that of Negoos Tekla Haimanot, King of Gojam ; but this force, instead of coming to the north-eastern is going to the western frontier, to Metemmeh, where he has been sent to under-

take a campaign against the dervishes. King Tekla Haimanot, has a great reputation as a soldier, and his men are said to be valuable and dashing soldiers ; moreover, his allegiance to King Johannis is, I am informed, unwilling. It is therefore probable that King Johannis hesitated to trust Tekla Haimanot in a campaign against Italy, and was still more unwilling to leave him to rest in peace in Gojam, when nearly all the remaining forces of Abyssinia were being concentrated in the north, and that it is for this reason that a campaign is to be opened against the Soudanese near Metemmeh.

(Signed) G. H. PORTAL.

Cairo, January 1, 1888.



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